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A PLACE TO SEE:
ECOLOGICAL LITERARY THEORY AND PRACTICE

by
Joni Adamson Clarke

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the
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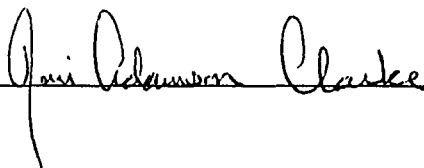
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A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Paul Adamson Clarke", written over a horizontal line.

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ABSTRACT

"A Place to See: Ecological Literary Theory and Practice" approaches "American" literature with an inclusive interdisciplinarity that necessarily complicates traditional notions of both "earliness" and canon. In order to examine how "Nature" has been socially constructed since the seventeenth century to support colonialist objectives, I set American literature into a context which includes ancient Mayan almanacs, the Popol Vuh, early seventeenth and eighteenth century American farmer's almanacs, 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu's autobiography, the 1994 Zapatista National Liberation army uprising in Mexico, and Leslie Silko's Almanac of the Dead.

Drawing on the feminist, literary and cultural theories of Donna Haraway, Carolyn Merchant, and Michel Foucault, Julia Kristeva, Edward Said, Annette Kolodny, and Joseph Meeker, I argue that contemporary Native American writers insist that readers question all previous assumptions about "Nature" as uninhabited wilderness and "nature writing" as realistic, non-fiction prose recorded in Waldenesque tranquility. Instead the work of writers such as Silko, Louise Erdrich, Simon Ortiz, and Joy Harjo is a "nature writing" which explores the interconnections among forms and systems of domination, exploitation, and oppression across their different racial, sexual, and ecological manifestations.

I posit that literary critics and teachers who wish to work for a more ecologically and socially balanced world should draw on the work of all members of our discourse community in cooperative rather than competitive ways and seek to transform literary theory and practice by bringing it back into dynamic interconnection with the worlds we all live in--inescapably social and material worlds in which issues of race, class, and gender inevitably intersect in complex and multi-faceted ways with issues of natural resource exploitation and conservation.

Towards an Ecological Literary Theory and Pedagogy

Standing again / with all things . . . / we acknowledge
ourselves / to be in a relationship that is responsible
/ and proper, . . . / for the sake of the land and all
people; / we ask humbly of the creative forces of life /
that we be given a portion / with which to help ourselves
so that our struggle / and work will also be creative /
for the continuance of life. . . .

--Simon Ortiz

It is theory that teaches me . . . that we belong not
only to networks of language and culture but also to the
networks of the land.

--Sue Ellen Campbell

The dimensions of a local or situated pedagogy are marked
by the mapping of local territories.

--Houston A. Baker, Jr.

Near the end of Leslie Marmon Silko's recently published novel, Almanac of the Dead, an "International Holistic Healer's Convention" is convened in Tucson, Arizona. The convention brings together an incredibly diverse group of ecologists, Native American medicine men and women, Mayan revolutionaries, ecowarriors, German root doctors, Celtic leech handlers, politicians, poets, lawyers, working class people, and new-age spiritualists who are representative of all the races, classes, and cultures of the world. As individuals and as groups, the people at the convention bring widely divergent and often contradictory perspectives to their discussions of how they might begin working for a more ecologically and socially balanced world. Indeed, there is only one thing about which they all agree: that the world is becoming ever and ever more violent, and something must be

done.

One of the most pressing issues scheduled for discussion on the convention agenda is an army of Mayan revolutionaries which has emerged from the rainforests of Southern Mexico and begun to march north from the state of Chiapas towards the US-Mexican border. Following the twin Mayan brothers who lead them, the rebels are marching to peacefully, yet dramatically, call attention to the ways in which the appropriation and destruction of indigenous lands is connected to the loss of indigenous lifeways and livelihoods. El Feo, one of the twin brothers, observes that once indigenous peoples lose their land, they are forced to labor for a living on the lands of large ranchers or landowners or move to the cities where they can practice their cultures only with great difficulty and most often must live in squalor. So this army is not simply protesting the loss of their rainforest landbase nor advocating the establishment of enclosed reserves where non-human rainforest species will be protected in their "pristine" environments. The members of this army see the fight for their land as a fight for "home" which goes hand in hand with the fight for social justice.

Published two years before the Zapatista National Liberation Army burst out of the great Lacandon rainforest in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas, Almanac of the Dead is an uncanny forecast of the issues that are currently being

raised at negotiations between the Mexican government and the Zapatista rebels.¹ Journalists, scholars, and politicians continue to try to make sense of the dramatic events in Chiapas, but one thing becomes increasingly clear: the Zapatista movement is much more than just a peasant rebellion about agrarian issues or a bid to save the rainforest. At the initial round of peace negotiations in San Cristobal de la Casas in February 1994, the Zapatistas did demand land reforms, but they also demanded political and cultural autonomy for Mexico's Indian peoples. Zapatista leaders want the human rights abuses against Mexico's indigenous peoples to end. They have made it absolutely clear that election reforms which guarantee that indigenous peoples will have a voice in shaping Mexico's future are one of their most important goals; they also insist that teaching the history and culture of Mexico's sizable Indian population in all of Mexico's public schools is key to ending human rights abuses.² For both the Zapatistas and the fictional members of Silko's Mayan army, then, land issues cannot be separated from social issues. Both of these armies illustrate that any discourse developed around human relation to the land must recognize not only the lands and non-human species involved but a complex cast of interrelated human players--Indian tribal groups, ranchers, landowners, first and third world politicians, military and business entities, peasant farmers, etc.

While it has become a commonplace in Native American studies to note that contemporary Native American poets and novelists frequently examine the relationship between humans and the land, it should be emphasized how often that relationship is examined in places which dramatically call attention to the same complex issues which the Zapatista rebels are addressing: namely, that the oppression of people, appropriation of indigenous lands, and the exploitation of the environment are connected. Contemporary Native American poetry and fiction almost never emerges in "pristine wilderness" areas, but like Almanac of the Dead, in the highly contested rainforests and borderlands between the U.S. and Mexico, or like Louise Erdrich's Tracks, on land that has been divided into allotments following passage of the Dawes Act, or like Simon Ortiz's "That's the Place the Indians Talk About," within the dangerous perimeters of a military testing and bombing range. In this poem, Ortiz writes about Coso Hot Springs, considered a sacred, healing place by native Shoshonean peoples. Speaking to an elder Paiute man, the narrator of the poem learns that the sacred hot springs which has always "spoken" to indigenous peoples is now fenced within the China Lake Naval Station, a center for the development and testing of U.S. military weapons. Now the people must "talk with the Navy people" to get permission to "talk with the hot springs power."³ Nevertheless, year after year, the elder

Paiute man and his people keep returning to the hot springs to hear voices bubbling up from deep within the earth and to listen to the "moving power of the voice, / the moving power of the earth / the moving power of the People" (Woven 324). Year after year, their return is an act of resistance which demonstrates that the fight for the earth is a fight for "home." The fence which separates the Shoshonean peoples from their sacred springs becomes a metaphor for the linked oppressions of people and land. By setting his analysis of the relationship between humans and the land in such a contested place, Ortiz dramatically illustrates that social issues and environmental issues cannot be separated.

Like Silko, Ortiz, and leaders of the Zapatista movement, more and more scholars, teachers, and writers from the international academic community are calling attention to the increasingly widespread human rights abuses and environmental exploitation occurring all over the world. Many literary and cultural critics have begun to argue that scholars must not limit the scope of their interventionist projects to examinations of how the oppressions of race, class, and gender are connected, but they must "extend their concern for instrumentally reduced and socially subjugated subjects beyond the exclusively human to the other-than-human, to intervene for the land."⁴ Scholars who analyze the ways in which the oppressions of humans and the environment are interrelated

offer diverse perspectives in their work and, sometimes, those perspectives contradict those of other scholars addressing the same issues. But many literary and cultural critics, feminists, ecologists, historians of science, and ecophilosophers agree about two things: first, that we must recognize ourselves not as masters of nature but as members of the biotic community; and second, as ecophilosopher Baird Caldicott succinctly reminds us, that our recognition of immersion in the biotic community

does not imply that we do not also remain members of the human community . . . or that we are relieved of the attendant and correlative moral responsibilities of that membership, among them to respect universal human rights and uphold the principles of individual human worth and dignity.⁵

Feminist historian of science and cultural critic Donna Haraway writes powerfully about the urgent need for scholars to intervene for both socially subjugated subjects and the land. In Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, Haraway draws conclusions which are similar to those drawn by the participants in Silko's fictional International Holistic Healer's Convention. Haraway argues that as we near the twenty-first century in communities that are everywhere increasingly violent, there is an urgent need to resist "a world-wide intensification of domination." Haraway observes--

and Silko's convention participants illustrate--that effective resistance to increasingly violent forms of social and ecological domination will require that we bring together the perspectives of many people and struggle to see from many "contradictory standpoints" because each "reveals dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point."⁶

In "The Land and Language of Desire," literary critic Sue Ellen Campbell offers a fine illustration of how the juxtaposition of seemingly contradictory standpoints can reveal unimagined possibilities. Campbell imagines a meeting between post-structuralist theorist Jacques Derrida and ecologically-minded writer Edward Abbey. By bringing theorist and nature writer together, Campbell is bringing two seemingly contradictory characters and perspectives together; in the process, she is imagining something very similar to the discussions which take place at Silko's fictional convention. Campbell finds that the most important premise shared by Derrida and Abbey is that "both criticize the traditional sense of a separate, independent, authoritative center of value or meaning; both substitute the idea of networks" (207). Campbell also finds an important philosophical difference between post-structural and ecological perspectives. Post-structuralists posit that texts are situated within a system of social, political, economic, cultural and personal

circumstances which direct us to particular readings; however, when we read, "all the meaning that matters, we create. There are no texts without readers. Our complicity is absolute" (205). To the ecologist or ecologically-minded writer, Campbell observes, the text--the land--does have meaning outside the reader. The Arctic may be read differently by an oilman than it is by an Eskimo, but the "land retains an identity of its own still deeper and more subtle than we can know."⁷ To the ecologist, a misread text--say a depleted aquifer--presents quite a different problem and raises different moral and ethical questions than a "misread text" presents to poststructuralist theorist.

In their work, both Haraway and Campbell illustrate that when seemingly disparate perspectives are brought together, it becomes possible to see how these perspectives are related to each other, how they reinforce each other's premises and pinpoint each other's blind spots. This is precisely what I propose to do in this dissertation. In the pages which follow, I bring the writing of contemporary Native American poets and novelists together with the diverse, and often contradictory, perspectives of post-structuralist theorists, ecologists, feminist historians of science, ecofeminists, anthropologists, literary critics, folklorists, and ethnologists. I will not be applying scholarly theories to the literature; rather, like Silko and her wildly diverse

convention participants, I will be bringing the seemingly "contradictory standpoints" of contemporary literary, feminist, and cultural theory together with contemporary Native American literature to argue that each scholar, poet, and novelist is creating theory, or theorizing, in ways that reinforce the other writers' premises and pinpoint the other writers' blind spots.

Indeed, I argue that if we would better understand both the currently unfolding events in Chiapas, Mexico, and contemporary Native American literary works like Silko's Almanac and Erdrich's Tracks, we must bring together and analyze the often contradictory creation stories, oral narratives, hieroglyphic codices, pre- and post-Columbian history, ancient and contemporary folklore, native and non-native languages, and native and non-native literary genres from which Native Americans have been creating their incredibly hybrid texts for hundred of years. I argue, for example, that by examining the ways in which sixteenth century Mayan priests clandestinely recorded as many of their ancient religious ceremonies, oral traditions, prayers, songs, and accounts of currently unfolding historical events in both Spanish and alphabetic Mayan, we can gain a better understanding of how and why contemporary Native American novelists and poets continue to create hybrid texts in which they are theorizing about how people of all races and cultures

might move away from the social and ecological violence of the past five-hundred years and towards an "ecology of justice" for the twenty-first century.

I begin to examine the ways in which fiction and poetry can be theory in Chapter One, "Why Bears are Good to Think and Theory Doesn't Have to be a Form of Murder." In an analysis of Tracks by Louise Erdrich, I discuss how and why contemporary Native American writers are creating playful, hybrid texts and examine how Erdrich literally creates her character Fleur as a hybrid text which brings ancient Annishinabeg oral narratives of bears, bearwalkers, lionmonsters, love-medicines, manitou, and windigo forward into the body of a twentieth-century character who recognizes that the oppressions of indigenous peoples and the land are linked. Using the work of both Gloria Anzaldua and Barbara Christian who argue that we must "give up the notion that there is a 'correct' way to write theory" and learn to appreciate and understand "other modes of consciousness," other ways of doing theory (Anzaldua, Making Face xxvi, 333), I argue that the creation of a hybridized character such as Fleur is another way of "doing theory." As Gloria Anzaldua observes, writers of color often write out of their sense of being "cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems" (La Frontera 78). They understand that "the future

depends on the breaking down of paradigms, it depends on . . . creating a new mythos--that is a change in the way we perceive reality, the way we see ourselves, and the ways we behave." Anzaldua calls this change "a new consciousness" or "la conciencia de le mestiza" (La Frontera 80). Anzaldua and Christian both argue that women writers of color--whose "intention is to communicate to masses of people made up of different audiences" and not just academically elite audiences (Making Face xxv), often deliberately blur the borderline between theoretical and non-theoretical writing and create their fiction and poetry as a place in which to theorize about how we might move towards a less violent future. In Tracks, then, Louise Erdrich illustrates that Native American people recognize that we live in a world changed by over 500 years of colonization and that survival will necessitate the creation of new paradigms or consciousnesses that bring many perspectives together.

In Chapter Two, "The Truth is We Live on Dry Land: Language as Homeland in Native American Literature," I use the words and work of Joy Harjo, Simon Ortiz, and Louise Erdrich to examine the process by which Native American writers hybridize the English language so that they may better express what Simon Ortiz calls a Native American "sense of place." Joy Harjo conveys the urgency which many Native American writers who speak English as a first language feel as they

engage in the process of creating their work. Harjo writes that she was sent to boarding schools so she was never able to speak her traditional Creek language and this reality has confirmed her status on what she calls a "brutal border." She explains that she is not able to speak her native language and so she must work in English which is often "not tribal, not spiritual enough" to meet her needs. Like other writers of color in the Americas who are not linguistically comfortable in either English or the language of their traditional cultures, Harjo finds herself inhabiting what Chicana poet and theorist Gloria Anzaldua has called a "borderland" between languages. But it is exactly at this juncture where cultures meet that Anzaldua finds hope that a hybrid language, a "language of the Borderlands" can be created and become "for some of us . . . a homeland" (55).

In Chapter Three, "A Place to See: From 'Early American' Almanacs to Almanac of the Dead," I examine in greater detail the ways in which Native Americans have been creating hybridized texts for centuries. I trace Silko's sources for Almanac of the Dead back to the earliest "American almanacs" which were carved into stone by Mayan priests in what is now the states of Chiapas and Oaxaca, Mexico. In order to examine how "nature" has been culturally constructed since the seventeenth century to support colonialist objectives, I also examine several other "almanacs": the Popol Vuh, early

seventeenth and eighteenth century American farmer's almanacs, and Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu's autobiography. I argue that although Almanac of the Dead might not be recognized as "theory" because it is not written in a conventionally recognized theoretical form--essay or scholarly text--Silko is raising many of the same issues which ecologists, ecofeminists, ecophilosophers, and feminist historians of science have been addressing in increasingly complex ways for over thirty years. Placing Silko's novel in the context of the recent Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, Mexico, I raise questions about what an "ecology of justice" in the Americas would entail.

In Chapter Four, "A Powerful Infidel Heteroglossia: Leslie Silko's Ecological Literary Criticism," I insist that an "ecological literary theory" must take the concept of place--defined as a complex network of material, geographical, historical, cultural, social, sexual, racial, and institutional environments--into account. While many "ecocritics" define "ecocriticism" as the "critical and pedagogical broadening of literary studies to include texts which deal with the nonhuman world and our relationship to it,"⁸ I argue for a radical shift in perspective in debates about the shape an emerging ecological literary theory and criticism might take. Focusing again on Almanac of the Dead, I argue that Silko's text demands that literary critics pay

attention not just to environmental degradation and the environmental movement but to an emerging environmental justice movement which recognizes the interconnections among forms and system of domination, exploitation, and oppression across their different racial, sexual, and ecological manifestations. I posit that an adequate literary theory must not only examine the issues of race, class, and gender, but also include a responsible ecological perspective which, like an ecosystem, would be context-dependent, centralize diversity, and always be in process.

In Chapter Five, "Running from Redhouse: Towards an Ecological Pedagogy," I raise questions about how the growing recognition of the nature, scope, and implications of ecological interdependence poses political and ethical challenges for professors and critics of literatures. Following Houston Baker's 1992 MLA Presidential address "Local Pedagogies," I argue that if we would work towards an "ecology of justice" for the twenty-first century, we need to be patient and committed teachers who are aware of both local and global patterns of oppression and help our students become more aware of how the oppressions of race, class, and gender are rooted in some of the same patriarchal conceptual frameworks of dominance that lead to the oppression of the land and non-human species.

Focusing on some of my experiences teaching Native American

college freshman, I ask how we might bring "place" or what Houston Baker has called "local pedagogies" into the classroom in order to make students and the general public more sensitive towards and knowledgeable about the places in which they live. Following ecophilosopher Lorraine Code, I argue that in an "ecologically-informed" classroom space, the aim is to "engage with differences that strengthen community and to develop political strategies sufficiently contextualized to address diverse experiences of domination and subjugation" (Code 370).

By asking Native American freshman students to bring their own "place" (stories of home, family, community, and land) into the classroom, I encourage students to frame the world with their own stories. In this way, they discover that "knowledge" is actually an ongoing conversation and that they can "get into the conversation." Like William Rueckert, I argue that with the widespread recognition that our environment is being radically changed and perhaps rendered uninhabitable by increasingly pervasive technologies, readers, critics, and teachers of literature must work to take place as a location and as an idea seriously.⁹ By developing theories and pedagogical practices which creatively work towards a relationship with "the land and all people" which is "responsible and proper," writes Simon Ortiz in "Mid America

Prayer," we "help ourselves so that our struggle / and work will also be creative / for the continuance of life."

Notes

1.The Zapatista rebellion began on January 1, 1994.

2.See Gary H. Gossen, "From Olmecs to Zapatistas: A Once and Future History of Souls." American Anthropologist. 96(3):553-570. Also see Joel Simon, "Zapatistas Caution Against Election Fraud," Arizona Daily Star. 8 August 1994: A11.

3.See Fight Back: For the Sake of the People, For the Sake of the Land in Ortiz's recently published collection of works, Woven Stone (323). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

4.Slack, Jennifer Daryl and Laurie Anne Whitt. "Ethics and Cultural Studies." in Cultural Studies. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, Paula Treichler, eds. New York: Routledge, 1992. 571-592. 588. Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

5.Caldicott, Baird. In Defense of the Land Ethic: Essays in Environmental Philosophy. New York: SUNY, 1989. 93. Also see Donna Haraway's discussion of Chico Mendez and the Amazon rainforest in "The Promises of Monster."

6. All the quotes cited in this paragraph are from Simian, Cyborgs, and Women (154).

7.The quoted material is from is a passage in Barry Lopez's Arctic Dreams (204) which Campbell quotes in her article.

8.Christopher Cokinos, Unpublished position paper entitled "What is Ecocriticism," distributed at the 1994 Western Literature Conference.

9.See William Rueckert, "Literature and Ecology: an Experiment in Ecocriticism."

Chapter One
 Why Bears are Good to Think and Theory Doesn't Have to Be Murder¹

Before one's eyes, Bear became Wolf, then Bear again. The image didn't change of course. What changed was the observer's organization of its parts. But the effect was one of transformation.

--Edmund Carpenter, "Introduction: Collecting Northwest Coast Art"

. . . any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. The notion of intertextuality replaces that of intersubjectivity, and poetic language is read as at least double.

--Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel"

In Tracks, Louise Erdrich transforms her Chippewa oral traditions to create a transformational female character with a "white wolf grin,"² "hips fishlike, slippery, narrow" (T 18), no fifth toes on her feet (T 18) and the "talons of a heavy bear" (T 157). Fleur Pillager is human; yet, at times, she is wolf, water-monster and bear. Indeed, she could be described as a visual pun who disorders the boundaries between human and animal. Even more disturbing, however, Fleur is suspected of transforming her private hairs, smoky powders, crushed snakeroot and Eli Kashpaw's fingernails into a love medicine, "a doll to wear between her legs" (T 49). Readers familiar with Lipsha, the lovable, yet somewhat bumbling medicine man of Love Medicine, will recognize the threat posed by Fleur's possible sorcery.

Asked by Grandma Kashpaw to create a love medicine that will squelch Grandpa Kashpaw's hankering after Lulu Lamartine,

Lipsha listens to stories and remembers things he'd "heard gossiped over."³ "These love medicines," he asserts,

is something of an old Chippewa specialty. No other tribe has got them down so well. But love medicine is not for the layman to handle. You don't just go out and get one without paying for it. Before you get one, even, you should go through one hell of a lot of mental condensation. You got to think it over. Choose the right one. You could really mess up your life grinding up the wrong little thing. (LM 199)

This is such terrifyingly serious business, that Lipsha steers clear of Old Man Pillager and does not ask for a proper love medicine. Rather, he grinds frozen turkey hearts--instead of goose hearts--into a concoction on which Grandpaw Kashpaw chokes and dies. Lipsha's learns that the "the actual power" of love medicine may be faith but faith is not enough (LM 203); one must evoke the power of the gods by knowing how to ask "in the right way" (LM 195). Fleur's association with love medicine, then, links her to the transformative power and potential danger of language.

Other Native American novelists also transform their oral traditions into the transformational characters that people their works, a process which N. Scott Momaday, in "The Man Made of Words," calls the "transformation of the tribal mind" or "myths, legends, and lore" into that "mature conditions

which we call literature" (107, 105). In Leslie Silko's Ceremony, for example, a young boy wanders into the "the place which belonged to the bears" (129) and begins to be transformed. A medicine man must call him back gently with "mother bear sounds" or he could "be in between forever / and probably he would die" (Silko_129, 130). And in the The Ancient Child, Momaday transforms traditional Kiowa stories of a mythical boy who becomes a bear into the novel's main protagonist, Locke Setman, who is called Set. Set has lost his sense of identity and comes to feel more and more like the bear boy whose people were no longer able, after his transformation, to understand his language. Set teeters on the edge of madness and speech begins to seem "the most important and necessary thing in his life" but "he did not even know what he wanted to say, had to say, if only he could say it" (73-74).

These transformational characters depend upon language: the Bear Boy will return but only if he is called back gently, Set will be healed but only if he discovers what he must say, and the power of Fleur's love medicine, as Lipsha's experience implies, will be efficacious only if she knows "how to ask in the right way" (LM 195). Transformational characters suggest, then, that Native American novelists are doing some serious--yet playful--theorizing on both the compelling power and menacing danger of language. Indeed, by focusing on the

perilously composite Fleur, I would like to examine how Louise Erdrich is transforming the novel into a site of imaginative theoretical discourse which challenges the notion that theory can only exist in language that is heavy, abstract, prescriptive, monotonous and accessible only to the few who are academically trained to understand "high discourse."

II

While a parallel could be drawn between Lipsha's discussion of love medicine and Derrida's discussion of the remedy and poison of the "pharmakon," some scholars would be loath to call fictional novels about bears and love medicines "theory" in the sense that Derrida's works on speech and writing are deemed "theory." Theory, as Trinh T. Minh-ha has observed in Woman, Native, Other, is often thought to be written by men and it is a commonplace to say that theory "usually refers to inaccessible texts that are addressed to a privileged, predominantly male social group" (41). She adds that theory has come to be "synonymous with the words 'profound,' 'serious,' 'substantial,' 'scientific,' 'consequential,'" (41). Fiction, on the other hand, is often written by women and frequently described by adjectives that are the antithesis of those used to describe theory-- "playful," "imaginative," "non-serious." Fictional or imaginative works, therefore, are usually not perceived as "theory."

In The Politics and Poetics of Transgression, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White trace how certain "high" discourses came to be valorized over those considered "low." The ancient taxation categories of "classici" and "proletarius," they write, subsequently led to distinctions between what was to be considered high and low discourse. This development in the generic terminology of antiquity "had an enduring influence on the European system of hierarchizing authors and works . . . [,] separated out a distinct elite set (the classici) from the commonality (the proletarius) and used this as a model for literary discriminations" (1). The result, Stallybrass and White maintain, was that any utterance became "legitimated or disregarded according to its place of [either high or low] production" (80). Only certain kinds of technical and philosophical writing, usually "constructed" as "high discourse" by those "normally associated with the most powerful socio-economic groups" and connected to church, state or academy (4) came to be valued and accepted as high discourse in Western literary traditions. This helps explain why the producers of "high" theoretical discourse, who have usually been men, generally have a prestige which gives them the authority "to designate what is to be taken as high and low in the society" (Stallybrass and White 4).

In the contemporary literary world, as Barbara Christian affirms in "The Race for Theory," works which are designated

"theory" and produced by the academically elite have become a "commodity which helps determine whether we are hired or promoted in academic institutions--worse, whether we are heard at all" (335). The result, Christian asserts, is that "critics are no longer concerned with literature, but with other critics' texts" (335). Contemporary fiction, often written by women and "bursting with originality, passion, insight and beauty" is subordinated to "one primary thrust, that moment when one creates a theory" (335). Moreover, the philosophical language of "high" theoretical discourse often "mystifies rather than clarifies," making it possible "for a few people who know that particular language to control the critical scene" (Christian 338).

But as Stallybrass and White point out, the view of discourse from "above" and the view of discourse from "below" are necessarily different (4). From the perspective of those who often do not have access to the power of the academically elite, or more specifically, as Gloria Anzaldua asserts in her Introduction to Making Face, Making Soul, from the perspective of women-of-color, the problem with contemporary literary theory is that it "does not translate well when one's intention is to communicate to masses of people made up of different audiences"; so, what is considered "theory in the dominant academic community is not necessarily what counts for theory for women-of-color" (xxv). The theorizing of women-of-

color, writes Barbara Christian, "(and I intentionally use the verb rather than the noun) is often in narrative forms, in the stories we create, . . . in the play with language, since dynamic rather than fixed ideas seem more to our liking" (336).

Originally "theory" meant a mental viewing, contemplation, speculation, spectacle, a conception or mental scheme of something to be done.⁴ Indeed, as Trinh asserts, theory is no longer . . . theoretical when it loses sight of its own conditional nature, takes no risk in speculation, and circulates as a form of administrative inquisition. Theory oppresses, when it wills or perpetuates existing power relations, when it presents itself as a means to exert authority--the Voice of Knowledge. (42)

When viewed from this perspective, Trinh adds, the "borderline between theoretical and non-theoretical writings is blurred and questioned, so that theory and poetry necessarily mesh" (42). Derrida's works, which are themselves very playful, become not just theory but imaginative fiction and Louise Erdrich's novels can be seen not just as poetical fiction but also as theory. Once we "give up the notion that there is a 'correct' way to write theory," Anzaldua writes, we can learn to appreciate and understand "other modes of consciousness," other ways of doing theory (xxvi, 333). A fictional novel

which is dynamic, imaginative and speculative becomes a very likely site for theoretical discourse. Indeed, it becomes possible to appreciate how contemporary Native American novels, and in particular Tracks, expose "one of the most powerful ruses of the dominant" which is to pretend that theoretical discourse "can only exist in the language of 'reason,' 'pure knowledge,' and 'seriousness'" (Stallybrass and White 43).

III

In Tracks, Nanapush, Fleur's trickster-like grandfather, makes the observation that there is a design to the stories (T 34), that they are "all attached, and once I start there is no end to telling because they're hooked from one side to the other, mouth to tail" (T 46). Dreaming and talking, he muses,

I liked to set out there and watch the road to see the design of people on their errands, to church and town, the eager step of courting boys, the secretive slide of lovers, the loads of hay that our best farmers, the Lamartines and Morrisseys, drove back and forth in poplar racks, the girls walking to the mercantile by twos, bearing cans of precious cream between them. (T 37)

From this veritable carnival of images, Nanapush creates a new story or text, a new "pattern,"⁵ to use his own word, which is so powerful that he specifically credits it with the power to heal. "During the year of sickness," he remembers, "when

I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story" (T 46).

Here, Nanapush is making an observation similar to one made by Julia Kristeva about how texts are produced. Indeed, he could be describing the process by which Erdrich herself creates both Fleur and her novel, Tracks. Any text, Kristeva asserts, "is the absorption and transformation of another" ("Word" 37), a kind of "destructive genesis" ("Word" 47) where "texts meet, contradict and relativize each other" ("Word" 49). By absorbing and transforming traditional Chippewa stories of Wolf, Water-Monster and Bear and then re-embodiment them in a new pattern to create Fleur, Erdrich generates a new pattern, a new text. Within the space of her novel, she allows traditional Chippewa myths of transformation to meet, contradict and relativize each other.

Nanabush's description of his new pattern as "hooked one side to the other, mouth to tail" aptly describes the myths which Erdrich transforms to create her text. According to A. Irving Hallowell, myths of transformation occur frequently among the Chippewa and illustrate a world view in which no sharp lines can be drawn dividing living beings. What "looks like a bear may sometimes be an animal" and on other occasions may be a "transformed person with evil intent" (Hallowell 158-59, 163-34). In Erdrich's novel, several Chippewa myths of transformation meet, contradict and become "hooked mouth to

tail" in the ambiguous character of Fleur. At times, Fleur, with her "teeth, strong and sharp and very white" (T 18), clearly embodies the traits of the mythic Wolf of traditional Chippewa lore. In the old stories, Wolf is sometimes the grandson and sometimes the underworld brother of Nanabozho (Dewdney 127), whom Gerald Vizenor describes as the compassionate woodland trickster (3). Similarly, Fleur, whose family is decimated by the spotted sickness, becomes the adopted grandchild of Nanapush who is a trickster/healer like Nanabozho and who brings Fleur back from the underworld with words and songs (T 4).

Yet on other occasions, with her "skin of lakeweed" (T 22), thin, green dress and damp, tail-like braids (T 18), Fleur seems to be Misshepesshu, the water monster, who was said by traditional Chippewa to be the underworld protector of Wolf and to cause death by drowning (Dewdney 128-129, 39). In this form, Fleur embodies the characteristics of a snake, who appears and disappears rapidly and who by sloughing off its skin seems to be immortal.⁶ Fleur's two near drownings as a young girl give the impression that she has been afforded more than one life, and when Jean Hat and George Many drown in Matchimanito Lake, she is suspected as the cause (T 11).

By disordering traditional Chippewa oral narratives of Wolf and Water-Monster and then re-embodying them in a new pattern, Erdrich creates a character who is slippery,

changeable and mysterious. She further underscores Fleur's bodily ambiguity and affords her great powers by strongly associating her with bears. Fleur belongs to the Pillager family, members of the bear clan who were possessors of both the power which "travels in the bloodlines, handed out before birth" (T 31) and the knowledge of "secret ways to cure and kill" (T 2). That Fleur is a powerful medicine woman whose bear power enables her to effect wonderful cures is evidenced when, in a brief, and again mysterious appearance as an older woman in The Beet Queen, she repairs Karl Adare's broken ankles and heals his pneumonia. Waking just before dawn, breathing more freely, Karl recalls his cure. "A bear rose between the fire and the reeds. In the deepest part of the night, the biggest animal of all came through in a crash of sparks and wheels" (51).

Bears, according to anthropologist Ruth Landes, were highly respected among traditional Chippewa for their mysterious qualities. Bears were considered "quasi-human, in anatomy, erect carriage, cradling of young with the forearms, enjoyment of sweets and liquors, manner of drinking liquid, shows of intelligence, [and] inclination to moderate behavior despite great physical strength" (27). Accordingly, they were often greeted as "honored guests" and treated to special foods known to suit their appetites, such as tobacco and berries (Landes 35). Moreover, a bear's life cycle, moving from

hibernation in winter to reemergence in the spring, made him seem at once a symbol of both death and life. As Victor Turner, in his discussion of snakes and bears, so aptly puts it, "This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterizes the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that and yet both" ("Betwixt" 99).⁷

That bears are often thought of as "betwixt and between" helps to explain why they are credited with such great powers. In tribal societies, symbolic or totemic creatures are singled out, as Barbara Babcock astutely observes, "not because they were 'good to eat' or 'good to prohibit' but because they were 'good to think'" (167). In other words, by thinking or "playing" with the bear's human-like qualities and seasonal cycle, formerly sharp borders--like those between animal and human, death and life--fade and "novelty emerges from unprecedented combinations of familiar elements" (Turner, "Liminal" 160). The seeming ambivalence of bears, then, is precisely what makes them "good to think." Similarly, Erdrich portrays Fleur as physically ambiguous and this makes her a character that is "good to think" because, as Judith Butler points out in her discussion of the subversion of gendered identity, "perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization" (138).

This openness to resignification, however, makes Fleur, like all liminally ambiguous creatures, dangerous, because she embodies what Julia Kristeva calls "the abject," or in other words, that which "disturbs identity, system, order" (Powers 4). Fleur disturbs order when, after losing her family, she leaves the traditional Chippewa world seeking a way to save the Pillager land from the tax collector. When she returns from the marginal town of Argus to live alone at Machimanito Lake tongues fly, for "a young girl had never done such a thing before" (T 8). Her anomalous actions are interpreted as a dangerous questioning of accepted social order because they de-form the continuously repeated traditions which have established what is considered normal or natural in her community; by failing to repeat those traditions, Fleur, like the "liminal monsters" which Turner discusses in "Process, System, and Symbol" reveals the "freedom, the indeterminacy underlying all culturally constructed worlds" (161). And since a given society may see anything that is not "subject to its laws" as "potentially against it" (Douglas 4), Fleur becomes, in the eyes of her people, abnormal and unnatural and therefore dangerous.

Both her inherited bear power and her anomalous actions lead Fleur's community to credit her with the malignant powers of a bearwalking sorcerer, or in other words, one who transforms herself into a bear in order to use her power for self-

aggrandizement. Bearwalkers manifest their evil power by appearing as bright lights at night, stealing the fingers and tongues of the dead, and causing the dreaded "twisted mouth" (Dorson 27, Landes 65). Fleur, it is rumored, has gotten herself into some "half-forgotten medicine" which causes her to cross boundaries and mess with evil, laugh at the old women's advice and dress like a man (T 12). She is thought to be the reason that the Agent spends the whole night "following the moving lights and lamps of people who would never answer him" and eventually ends up "gambling with ghosts" (T 9). She is suspected of performing such nefarious work as laying the "heart of an owl on her tongue," keeping "the finger of a child in her pocket" (T 12), stalking the Morrissey who caused "the Pillager baldness," then clipping his hair and paring his nails in order to afflict him with "twisted mouth" (T 122). Ironically, the men who rape Fleur in Argus freeze in a meat locker though wrapped in the skins of bears (T 30). And predictably, it is Fleur who is suspected of causing the tornado that turns everything in Argus "upside down" (T 28).

Like Fleur, Tracks is a transformational text which cavorts in the margins and flirts with danger because it plays with different parts of traditional myths, pulls stories this way and that and threatens to alter the shape of the oral tradition by bringing it into a new, written, pattern. But as the following scene implies, Erdrich is not unmindful of the

destruction or danger inherent in what Kristeva has called the "generative process" ("Word" 47). As Nanapush sits reading his newspaper from Grand Rapids, his wife, Margaret, wishes to speak with him. But "there was bad news from overseas and I wasn't about to let Margaret spoil my concentration or get past my hiding place" (T 47). In anger, Margaret swipes

at the sheets with her hand, grazed the print, but never quite dared to flip it aside. This was not for any fear of me, however. She didn't want the tracks rubbing off on her skin. She never learned to read, and the mystery troubled her. (T 47)

Margaret's revulsion to the written word or "tracks" and Nanapush's frank admission that he sometimes hides behind his newspaper from the humanizing influence of voice and dialogue imply that Erdrich is aware of the potential danger of setting oral stories into writing. An oral story, as Bernard Hirsch points out, once fixed on the page and removed from its "immediate context, from the place and people who nourished it in the telling" could be robbed of its meaning (1).

However, all transformational art, writes Levi-Strauss in his discussion of Northwest Coast Mask art, questions and answers other past or present myths and must be considered in relation to the art which it absorbs and transforms; it cannot be "considered in isolation" ("Masks" 93). In her analysis of Laguna witch woman stories, T.C.S. Langen makes a similar

observation about oral storytelling. Each telling or version of a story, she writes, is a "realization of possibilities provided by the collection" of renditions or versions of that story and "no one version is an isolate, either for the storyteller or the audience, but resounds against the knowledge of the collection held by each person present at the performance" (6). In the Chippewa community, Ruth Landes has observed, variant versions of myths and stories have always "shifted with the personalities speaking, perhaps with the occasions, and with the localities" (199). A storyteller, notes Landes, would revise and retell a story while the audience, already familiar with the stories as traditionally told, understood that the teller's version was an interpretation on the "fixed" text. In other words, a new telling or version of a story can at once be a criticism and commentary on the tale as previously told. "What we hear" from the storyteller, Dennis Tedlock asserts, "is simultaneously something new and a comment on [the] relic, both a restoration and a further possibility" (236).⁸

Tracks, then, though set in print, does not rob the tales it transforms of their meaning because it resounds against all past and present tellings of the tales and realizes their potential. The novel enters into an ongoing critical conversation, if you will, with past and present tellers of traditional Chippewa myths; however, Erdrich's

"interpretation" of traditional tales does disorder the order of the oral tradition and threaten to alter their shape. But this is precisely where the potential power of this boundary-transgressing text lies. As Mary Douglas explains in Purity and Danger, the "danger which is risked by boundary transgression is power" (161). Order, Douglas observes,

implies restriction; from all possible materials, a limited selection has been made and from all possible relations a limited set has been used. So disorder by implication is unlimited, no pattern has been realized in it, but its potential for patterning is indefinite. (94)

By playing with the myths of Wolf, Missepeshu, and Bear, Erdrich opens these transformational myths to the power and potential of resignification and recontextualization and in them finds the materials for new pattern. In a sense, she is doing what a sorcerer or bearwalker does when creating a love medicine. By bringing together the "marginal stuff" which traverses the outer limits of the body and represents the vulnerability of all boundaries--nail and hair clippings, spittle, milk, blood and tears--the sorcerer symbolically invokes those powers which are constantly menacing order, threatening to disorder previously established limits (Douglas 121). Using words, the sorcerer then attempts to control this power and "transform the path of events by symbolic enactment" (Douglas 86). But this is very dangerous, for "words

correctly said are essential to the efficacy of an action" (Douglas 86); if words are not correctly said, powers might shoot out uncontrollably, menacingly. This potential for both power and danger explains why traditional Chippewa were often horrified by the thought of love medicine (Landes 62).

Like her character Lipsha, author Erdrich listens to the stories and finds the powerfully energized "marginal stuff" from which to create a liminal monster, an ambiguously transformational text which is "good to think" because it disorders the problematic boundaries between the oral and the written and reveals the potential for new pattern. Erdrich's challenge, however, is to repattern the stories with words that will be "correctly said," to create a love medicine that will be able to control the very real power and danger of her disordered materials. Depending on how they are recontextualized, the power of the traditional stories can be transformed for good or for ill. If Erdrich's "version" fails to preserve the voices and variant tellings of the oral tradition, it can, like Derrida's pharmakon, be poison; if the narrative is composed in such a way that it perpetuates what Nanapush calls the "design of the people" and the "stories" (T 37, 34), then it can be cure.

IV

Though Tracks is unavoidably cut off from the breath of the storyteller, Erdrich demonstrates the dialogic nature of

the oral tradition and shows, to use the words of Arnold Krupat, "a reluctance to give up the voice in favor of the text" (Voice 20). Erdrich invokes the "feel" of an oral performance and emphasizes the novel as a form of discourse by narrating the novel from two points of view. Both narrators--one a neurotic nun and the other a trickster grandfather--tell Fleur's story in the first person, as if their audience were present and engaged in the act of judging which narrator's version--Pauline's or Nanapush's--the more credible. This storytelling strategy creates distance from certainty and asserts that there is never "one true telling" of a story, but only differing versions. In this way, Erdrich narrates her novel through "play" and undercuts any monologic position she might take as a storyteller.

Pauline's interpretation or theory of Fleur differs dramatically from Nanapush's. A mixed-blood Catholic, Pauline characterizes herself as "devious and holy" (T 69), but she is characterized by Nanapush as "a born liar" (T 53), one who was given to using words to tell "odd tales that created damage" (T 39). Pauline is always associated with death and at the death bed of a dying girl, sees herself as a hovering scavenger, "twirling dizzily, my wings raked the air, and I rose in three powerful beats and saw what lay below" (T 68). Her employment washing and laying out the dead is appropriate, for as Nanapush observes, she is "afraid of life" but "good at

easing souls into death" (T 57). Because she is so tall and skinny that men look past her without even seeing her, because she is so greedy that she can eat Fleur's food even when Fleur is pregnant and malnourished (T 145), and because she seems "afflicted, touched in the mind" (T 39), Erdrich implies Pauline is "windigo." Helen Jaskoski explains that in traditional Chippewa tales,

Windigo is a giant, a skeleton of ice, the embodiment of winter starvation, a cannibal who can devour whole villages. Windigo sickness occurs when this dangerous spirit takes possession of a human soul, causing an irresistible desire to consume human flesh. Individuals subject to such possession show signs of their vulnerability in greedy gluttony, especially an insatiable appetite for fat and greases. . . . Sometimes the monster itself is not killed but returns to natural human life after being relieved of its icy carapace; in the same way, a person afflicted with windigo psychosis might return to normal after melting or losing the heart of ice. (57)

Pauline's cold "cannibalism" manifests itself when she closes the door to the meat locker in Argus, causing two men to freeze to death and another, as a result of his ordeal, to lose his rotting flesh, little by little. Later, she strangles her abandoned child's father, Napoleon Morrissey,

with a rosary (T 27, 62, 202). "I stuffed the end of the blanket in his mouth," she remembers, "pushed him down into the sand and then fell upon him and devoured him, scattered myself in all direction, stupefied my own brain in the process so thoroughly that the only things left of intelligence were my doubled-over hands" (T 202). To atone for her sins, she enters a Catholic convent with a vengeance but even in her new vocation her greed is insatiable. Seeking to hoard spiritual knowledge, she miswears her shoes for mortification, wears undergarments made of potato sacks and never pays an extra visit to the privy.⁹ Despite these outward shows of pious humility, however, Pauline's icy, windigo heart does not melt. "All winter," she admits, "my blood never thawed" (T 136).

Though Pauline scorns Chippewa belief in the power of bears and the evil of the water monster, she thinks of Satan as Missepeshu and sees both Fleur and Nanapush as Satan's agents.¹⁰ Like the feared Chippewa sorcerers who were linked to the "lion" in the lake and who "did not use their knowledge for the good of the tribe . . . but merely for personal aggrandizement" (Dewdney 120), Pauline piously determines that she will use "the net of [her] knowledge" (T 140) to "guide [her people], to purify their minds, to mold them in her own image" (T 205). Sometimes telling the truth, sometimes--according to Nanapush--lying, but always molding and purifying her story to fit her single-minded vision of theological

certainty, Pauline, as Kristeva might say, "kills substance to signify" (Revolution 75). Even after the murder of Napoleon Morrissey, for example, she can say, "I felt a growing horror and trembled all through my limbs until it suddenly was revealed to me that I had committed no sin. There was no guilt in this matter, no fault" (T 203). Assuring herself that she could not have known what shape the devil would take, she molds her interpretation of events to fit her high and holy purpose.

Pauline's twisted, self-inflicted penance determines the way she shapes her interpretation of Fleur. She comes to believe that her people, the Chippewa, are like the buffalo--unavoidably dying out (T 140); so, she gives herself a "mission" to "name and baptize" her people and lead them away from the traditional four day road to the "new road" of "Christ" (T 140). Since Fleur is linked to the traditional ways--dances, love medicines, ceremonies and cures, Pauline decides Fleur is a "hinge" that can "close the door or [swing] it open" (T 139) and keep the people from entering upon Christ's road. Seeking to "close this door" just as she closed the door of the meat locker, words become Pauline's weapons and Fleur the target of vicious rumors. Fleur, Pauline lets it be known, is most probably a bearwalker (T 12) and her baby almost certainly the progeny of the watermonster (T 31). Significantly, it is Pauline, who is "afraid of life,

. . . afraid of birth, afraid of Fleur Pillager" (T 57), who kills the last bear on the reservation (T 58).

Nanapush tells his version of Fleur very differently from the way Pauline renders hers. Since Nanapush knows of secret medicines, "plants to spread so that I could plunge my arms into a boiling stew kettle, pull meat from the bottom, or reach into the body itself and remove . . . the sickness" (T 188), the text implies that he, like the trickster Nanabozho, is a healer. Unlike Pauline, he is always associated with life and prevents death with words. "During the year of sickness, when I was the last one left, I saved myself by starting a story. . . . I got well by talking. Death could not get a word in edgewise, grew discouraged, and traveled on" (T 46). However, Nanapush also understands the danger of words. He had "spoke aloud the words of a government treaty and refused to sign the settlement papers that would take away our woods and lake" (T 2), so he had witnessed first hand the role that language can play in the systematic oppression of a people. As "for government promises," he notes, "the wind is steadier" (T 33).

Unlike Pauline, Nanabush does not believe his people are a noble but dying race. "We Indians are like a forest," he asserts, "The trees left standing get more sun, grow thick" (T 184). Consequently, in Fleur, "the lone survivor of the Pillagers," Nanabush sees the "funnel of our history" (T 178).

He sees that through her powerful bear-clan bloodline, the old ways course into the modern world. Through her, the Manitou speak: "Turtle's quavering scratch, the Eagle's high shriek, Loon's crazy bitterness, Otter, the howl of Wolf, Bear's low rasp" (T 59).¹¹ Nanapush understands how Fleur's ties to the other world of the Manitou can provide her with the power to survive and endure in a world where "trouble [comes] from the living, from liquor and the dollar bill" (T 4). He does not seek to kill or "close the door" to the manifold, polyvocal traditions which she embodies; instead, pressing charcoal into her hand, he urges her to "Go down to the shore," and "Make your face black and cry out until your helpers listen" (T 177).

While Pauline's interpretation of Fleur is suspect because of her aberrant theological bias, Nanapush's interpretation cannot be entirely trusted either. After all, he was given his name, as his father tells him, because it had "to do with trickery" (T 33). Nanapush is associated, therefore, with the trickster Nanabozho who, according to Gerald Vizenor, "wanders in transformational space" (3) and "represents a spiritual balance in a comic drama rather than the romantic elimination of human contradiction and evil" (4). Tricksters, Barbara Babcock explains, are paradox personified; as 'criminal' culture-heros, they are "positively identified with creative powers" yet constantly behaving "in the most

antisocial manner we can imagine" ("Tolerated" 147). Nanapush may be able to cure with words but, paradoxically, his "high" position as healer is often hard to take seriously because of his constantly comic, "low" behavior. He is not above engaging in lewd joking with Margaret nor is he shy about lifting Pauline's habit with his walking stick in an effort to discover how she manages the "low functions" while wearing rudely sewn potato sacks (T 143).

Because Fleur does not narrate her own story, because her story is narrated by a "high" and holy nun who would suppress life itself in her attempt to impose homogeneous order on heterogeneous reality and by a "low" pagan (T 143) who would celebrate contradiction, and because Erdrich literally transforms and embodies oral traditions in a written narrative, Tracks is unconventional in both form and content-- doubly transgressive, if you will. But in transgressing and disordering the boundaries of conventional novelistic form, Erdrich finds materials for a narrative style which lends itself perfectly to the creation of a transformational character who has many faces and no fixed identity, who cannot be brought into any kind of order. The contradictory interpretations of Fleur, like the oral tradition itself, become the object of continual interpretation and retelling-- changeable, disreputable, contradictory and variable. As Catherine Rainwater notes, Erdrich's narrative strategy makes

the "problematic nature of interpretation" apparent (413) and draws her reader into the storytelling process. Finally, the reader, just as if she were at an actual oral storytelling performance, must listen to both Pauline's and Nanapush's stories and create her own interpretation or theory of Fleur by carefully weighing what she knows about each narrator against their interpretations of the story; then the reader must "hook" parts of each version of the story together to create a "design" (T 37) of her own.

As Rainwater points out, Tracks "does not overdetermine one avenue of interpretation" (Rainwater 410); but Erdrich does dramatically illustrate the difference between those, like Pauline, who use "high" institutionally-sanctioned language to dangerously constrict, objectify, and dehumanize, and those, like Nanapush, who playfully insist on the ambiguous, ironic, liberating aspects of language to confront the violence of controlling systems--be they governmental, religious, economic or textual. As Nanapush tells Father Damien, in an animated discussion of whether or not the "unyielding surfaces" of the Catholic church's pews are "helpful," "[T]he old gods were better, the Anishinabe¹² characters . . . were not exactly perfect but at least they did not require sitting on hard planks" (T 110). Here, Nanapush invokes the "old gods" to unmask and undermine those who would pretend to an authority based on natural order

and/or neutral legality. Erdrich disorders the boundaries between "high" and "low" by demonstrating how the oral tradition, which has usually been assigned to the category of "low" discourse¹³ because it is historical, changing, contradictory and unwritten, can live in the "tracks" of a printed text and serve as the antithesis of all that is hard, unyielding or finished, to every ready-made solution in the sphere of thought and world outlook.

Tracks playfully transforms oral myths of bears, bearwalkers, lion-monsters, love-medicines, sorcerors, old-gods and windigo into a speculative discussion of the power and danger of language to either constrict or liberate; consequently, the novel is the kind of dynamic theory which, Kristeva might say, is "not a form of murder" (Revolution 72) because it does not "kill substance to signify" (Revolution 75) nor mask the polyphony of many voices. To use Nanapush's words, "Death [can] not get a word in edgewise" here (T 46), and that makes Tracks a love medicine which is not poison but cure.

V

Nanapush specifically credits stories with the power to heal (T 46) and thus Erdrich implies that she does not transgress and disorder the boundaries of the oral tradition or transfer her culture's myths and narratives from one site of discourse to another just for the sake of entertainment.¹⁴

As Mary Douglas explains, whenever members of a given society question or transgress agreed-upon boundaries, the questions are usually not phrased primarily to satisfy [human] curiosity about the seasons and the rest of the natural environment. The "relation of cloud to rain and rain to harvest, of drought to epidemic . . . are taken for granted as the back-drop against which more personal and pressing problems can be solved" (90). Instead, questions are usually phrased to "satisfy a dominant social concern" (91). The live issue, writes Douglas, "is how to organise other people and oneself in relation to them; . . . how to gain one's rights, how to prevent usurpation of authority, or how to justify it" (91).

When Fleur questions the boundaries of her world and ventures beyond the confines of traditional Chippewa society, her questioning is a response to an urgent social concern: how to save her land. In short, she is searching for a way to survive in a changing world. She becomes what Edmund Leach has called a "marginal creature," one of those incarnate deities, virgin mothers, or supernatural monsters who are half human/half beast and are "specifically credited with the power of mediating" between "logically distinct categories" such as "this world and the other world" (39). Fleur illustrates that survival will necessitate a crossing of boundaries between the traditional Chippewa world and the world of White government, religion, economics and custom. Her anomalousness repulses

her community; and yet, at the same time, her search for a way to survive fascinates them because it offers the possibility that she may become the possessor of great knowledge and power, a potential mediator.

In response to Erdrich's own questions and concerns about her people and her world, Tracks mediates between the logically distinct, yet problematic categories of oral and written to tell the story of Fleur's survival and endurance. The novel illustrates how transforming the old stories into new forms can help answer urgent questions of social and practical concern and be, as Nanapush repeatedly affirms, healing. Perhaps a story from Love Medicine, which Lipsha remembers as he stands on a bridge and looks at the river below, best explains this relationship between stories and healing. The river, Lipsha recalls, "was the last of an ancient ocean, miles deep, that once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. It was easy to still imagine us beneath them vast unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land" (LM 272). Compelled to remember this tale by concern for himself and his community, Lipsha's new telling of the story in a new setting becomes a bridge or mediator between the old ways and the changed world in which he finds himself; Lipsha's contemporary interpretation of the story is healing because it infuses him with a power that will help him survive and endure.

VI

Tracks, then, demonstrates that literature, and in particular the novel, offers multiple narrative possibilities which can be employed to defy any fixed pronouncement or theoretical stance that, in Trinh's words, "presents itself as a means to exert authority--the Voice of Knowledge" (42). Because of these narrative possibilities, writes Anzaldua, many contemporary women-of-color occupy and transform the novel into a "theorizing space" (xxv) where "social issues such as race, class and sexual difference are intertwined with the narrative and poetic elements of the text" (xxvi). In this theorizing space, the terms "high" and "low," which are often employed as virtual synonyms for the terms "textuality" and "orality" and "theory" and "fiction," are exposed as value-laden and artificial. Indeed, Erdrich's novel bridges the gap between high and low discursive space and challenges those who would pretend that theoretical discourse can only exist in learned journals and be understood by those whose academic degrees confer upon them the authority to read and understand its heavy, serious and abstract language.

In language which is pithy, pleasurable and accessible to large audiences, Tracks assumes an implicitly theoretical stance¹⁵ by taking up the "changing, ongoing, vital [Chippewa] oral and literary traditions" which, as Erdrich tells interviewer Kay Bonnetti, "form [her] work" (98) and

transforming them into a written narrative which constantly transgresses boundaries between traditional narratives and contemporary written narrative, present and relevant past--questioning and reinterpreting each in order to create new patterns from old elements. In this way, Erdrich brings the beauty, vitality, and healing potential of the old stories forward into the present to help ensure that "the oral tradition remain viable for generations to come."¹⁶ The story, writes Erdrich, "comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning" (T 31).

Notes

1.As Kristeva notes in the passage I quote at the head of this essay, "any text is the absorption and transformation of another." A quick glance at the list of works this paper cites will reveal that my title absorbs and transforms the title of Barbara Babcock's essay "Why Frogs are Good to Think and Dirt is Good to Reflect On" which, in turn, is a playful absorption and transformation of "Levi-Strauss's repeated assertion that certain animals are singled out as symbolic or totemic creatures" because they are "good to think" (Babcock 167).

2.Tracks (19). Subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically as T, with page numbers in the text.

3.Love Medicine (203). Subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically as LM, with page numbers in the text.

4.See The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1971) 2: 3284.

5.Remembering how he saved Fleur from the sickness, Nanapush states, "I was entangled with her. Not that I knew it at first. Only looking back is there a pattern" (T 33).

6. For more on the snake's transformative powers, see Susan Scarberry-Garcia's Landmarks of Healing (43), and Victor Turner's "Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage (99).

7. In Landmarks of Healing: A Study of House Made of Dawn, Susan Scarberry-Garcia's chapter entitled "Bears and Sweet Smoke" has an excellent discussion on the bear as a "primary model of transformation" and "the living embodiment of the continuously generating healing powers of nature" (40).

8. See Tedlock's discussion of Zuni oral storytelling in The Spoken Word and the Work of Interpretation. In every Zuni household, writes Tedlock,

there is at least one parent or grandparent who knows how to interpret the [Creation story]. I say "interpretation" partly because these are not fixed texts. The stresses, pitches, pauses, and also the sheer words, are different from one interpreter to the next, and even from one occasion to the next, according to the place and time, according to who is in the audience, according to what they do or do not already know, according to what questions they may have been asked. . . . We are in the presence of a performing art, all right, but we are getting the criticism at the same time and from the same person. (236)

9. A Irvin Hallowell explains that in Chippewa (Ojibwa) culture, a "balance, a sense of proportion must be maintained in all interpersonal relations and activities. Hoarding, or any manifestation of greed, is discountenanced" (172). Even overfasting for spiritual knowledge, notes Hallowell, is judged to be "as greedy as hoarding" (173).

10. Pauline's equation of both Fleur and Nanapush with the lake monster and her resolve to "transfix [them] with the cross" (200) is highly ironic considering that once she determines that "Christ had hidden out of frailty, overcome by the glitter of copper scales, appalled at the creature's unwinding length and luxury" (195), she becomes the serpent. "It was I with the cunning of serpents" (T 195), she brags; and, after she plunges her arms into Nanapush's kettle of boiling water (to melt her windigo heart, perhaps?), she "[sheds] a skin" (T 195). Since, as Selwyn Dewdney observes, the Chippewa's lake monster was often described as a "sinister lion" (39, 122) and Pauline herself notes that Missepesu takes the "body of lion" (T 11), it is exceedingly appropriate that her name be changed to "Sister Leopolda." For an excellent discussion of Sister Leopolda's fight with the devil/windigo/Missepesu for control of Marie Kashpaw's heart in Love Medicine, see Helen Jaskoski (54-59).

11. In "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View," A. Irving Hallowell explains that "Manitou" or "manitu" is generally considered a synonym for a person of the "other-than-human" class. Citing the field work of Paul Radin and John M. Cooper, he asserts that the Manitou were never thought of as impersonal, supernatural, universal beings but rather as supernatural personal beings who displayed the characteristic of beings who were able to transform themselves into other forms. Whether human or animal in form or name, these characters behaved like people, though many of their activities are depicted in a spatio-temporal framework of cosmic, rather than mundane, dimensions. The Manitou frequently interacted with human beings and liked to be talked about, so they often came to listen to the tales being told about them. Sometimes called "our grandfathers," these characters were generous and given to sharing their power with human beings.

12. According to Gerald Vizenor, the Chippewa are also called the Ojibwa but are more correctly called Anishinabeg which is a collective name referring to those who speak the same woodland language (13).

13. See Arnold Krupat's discussion in "Post-Structuralism and Oral Literature," of "high" and "low" as virtual synonyms for the terms textuality and orality (113-114).

14. In Ceremony, Leslie Silko writes: "I will tell you something about stories, . . . / They aren't just entertainment. / Don't be fooled. / They are all we have, you see, / all we have to fight off / illness and death" (2).

15. Here, I echo Elaine Jahner who states that "Momaday's journey to Rainy Mountain uses no language we ordinarily deem theoretical; nevertheless, a realized theoretical stance is implicit in it. In its structure and content it illustrates a traditional mode of textual interpretation. It examines the possibilities of transferring that mode from oral to written texts" (163).

16. This is the point that Susan Scarberry Garcia makes about Momaday's incorporation of the "beauty, design and vitality" of traditional Navaho and Kiowa stories into his novel, House Made of Dawn (71).

Chapter Two

"The Truth is We Live On Dry Land":
Language as Homeland in Native American Literature

. . . my language, a new language--the language of the Borderlands. There, at the juncture of cultures, languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born.

--Gloria Anzaldua¹

We all watch for fire / for the fallen dead to return /
and teach us a language so terrible / it could resurrect
us all.

--Joy Harjo²

It has been this resistance--political, armed, spiritual--
which has been carried out by the oral tradition. The
continued use of the oral tradition today is evidence
that the resistance is on-going.

--Simon Ortiz³

At the end of Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine, Lipsha Morrissey, a young mixed-blood Chippewa who has recently discovered his identity as the grandson of powerful medicine men and women,⁴ is driving his blue Firebird home to the reservation. He stops on a bridge which spans the border between the United States and Canada, gets out of his car and walks over to the bridge's rail where he has a vision. Lipsha is blessed with these flashes of vision, he candidly confides to the reader, because he has inherited "some powers which . . . was likely come down from Old Man Pillager"⁵ and because he is good at remembering the "little things [he'd] heard gossiped over" (LM 199)--like Grandma Kashpaw's teachings on "visioning" (LM 248). Looking down from the bridge into the swirling water below, Lipsha remembers how the "old ones" had

offered tobacco to the water and how they had believed this river close to the Chippewa homeland was the "last of an ancient ocean, miles deep, that once had covered the Dakotas and solved all our problems. . . . It was easy," Lipsha muses, "to still imagine us beneath them vast unreasonable waves, but the truth is we live on dry land" (LM 272).⁶

By acknowledging he lives on "dry land" now, Lipsha finds vision and power in his cultural heritage, but he refuses to romanticize the past. Clearly, he understands that he lives in a world changed by five-hundred years of colonization on the North American continent, a borderland where survival or "coming home" entails a process of reconstructing fragmented memories of the past in ways that transform the present.⁷ He may search the past for the source of his identity but years interference and repression by the US government have fragmented his people's culture; for Lipsha this means that his search for a "home" will be complicated by the fact that he does not possess the original language of his ancestors and that he only partially possesses their stories and history. Indeed, there can be no innocent or unpoliticized gathering of memories of the ancestral culture and homeland, Louise Erdrich explains to interviewer Kay Bonnetti, since one cannot remember the "old ones" without also remembering "the people who've not been able to survive" (91).

But Lipsha, as the discussion that follows will make

clear, is a survivor; moreover, he is, to use his own words, "alive to tell the tale" (LM 202). He illustrates Erdrich's devotion to telling about the lives which she sees, "stretching back, breaking, surviving somehow, and incredibly, culminating in somebody who can tell a story" (Bonnetti 98). Lipsha's narrative and vision demonstrate that Erdrich privileges the stories of her people's resistance and survival over the stories of her people's suffering, degradation and demise told by the dominant culture. Erdrich would rather tell, to use Joy Harjo's poetically apt words, "the fantastic and terrible story of all of our survival / those who were never meant / to survive" (Horses 15). Like other American writers of color, Erdrich is interested in how colonized groups struggle to tell their own story or, in other words, recover themselves through language. She is interested in how words can be an act of resistance and how stories from the past and stories of survival can move a people beyond domination.

By focusing on the poetry, novels, essays and interviews of Louise Erdrich, Joy Harjo and Simon Ortiz, then, I would like to explore how contemporary Native American writers struggle for a transformed language, one that is capable of creating a place in which to tell the story of their survival. Acoma poet Simon Ortiz and Creek poet Joy Harjo both see "place" as key to this struggle for a transformed language.

"Place," as Ortiz defines it, is more than just the location of one's birth and the physical and geographical ground one literally inhabits--although these are crucially important to the development of one's sense of place. "Place," for Ortiz, is the "spiritual source" of "who you are in terms of you identity," or in other words, your belief system, your whole lifestyle, and the oral and written literatures which nurture your beliefs and lifeways (Coltelli 104-105, Poetic 9). Ortiz is emphatic that the oral traditions which he sees as an integral part of Native American writer's spiritual source or place not be defined too strictly. Not only does the Native American oral tradition include ancient stories of creation and mythological stories of interaction between gods and humans, the oral tradition also includes a continuously growing body of oral stories which speak "crucially about the experience of colonization" (National 10).

In Ortiz's own work, for example, the "oral tradition" includes ancient stories which tell of his tribe's emergence from the earth into this world, historical stories which tell of his tribe's revolt against Spanish conquistadors in 1640, and contemporary stories of his people's resistance to the colonization of the Four Corners area by multi-national uranium and coal mining corporations. Ortiz adds that the continued use of these ancient, historical and contemporary oral traditions in the work of contemporary Native American

writers who work primarily in English is evidence that these writers are engaged in a process of transforming English or "the language [they have] come to use" into a Native American language. Language, whether it is the language a writer is "born into" or one he or she has "come to use," is a very contested site and must be considered an important part of the writer's spiritual source; language, Ortiz concludes, must be thought of as an integral part of one's place (Coltelli 105). Moreover, by examining how Native American writers bring their own spiritual source or place into their work to transform the language they have "come to use," it is possible to see how these writers are producing what Ortiz calls a "resistance literature" which energizes the contemporary struggle of colonized peoples against all who would usurp their heritage, land and resources (National 10, Coltelli 105-106).

In a 1985 interview with Laura Coltelli, Louise Erdrich explains that she and many other American Indian authors work primarily in English instead of their native languages because "English is a language which has been imposed on Indian people through a whole series of concerted efforts" (Coltelli 47). One of the more infamous of the concerted efforts to which Erdrich is referring was the United States government's system of forced education for Native American children. From 1879 until the 1930s, children were often literally kidnapped and

sent long distances from their homes and families to government boarding schools where teachers insisted that they give up their cultures and languages and accept new identities as members of a foreign culture.⁸ In the 1940s and 1950s, children were sometimes able to attend day schools closer to their homes but native languages were still forbidden within the walls of the school. Recalling his own kindergarten experience in the 1940s at a Bureau of Indian Affairs Day School, Simon Ortiz remembers that he quickly learned

how language was used . . . against us, really to identify us but more than that, to keep us in our place. . . . I mean, you need to get punished and embarrassed and humiliated just about once and then you learn to speak English pretty well. (Ortiz, *Poetics* 7)

That several generations of American Indian people have been forcibly cut off from their traditional languages is reflected, Erdrich points out, by the fact that almost all writers from contemporary American Indian communities "speak English as their main language, as their first language" (Coltelli 47). Ortiz observes that some

argue that this means that Indian people have succumbed or become educated into a different linguistic system and have forgotten or have been forced to forsake their native selves. This is simply not true. Along with their native languages, Indian women and men have carried

on their lives and their expression through the use of the newer language. (National 10)

Ortiz is not arguing that traditional native languages are no longer important to the communities that speak those languages or that the English language should replace native languages; he speaks his own Acoma language and sees traditional languages as perhaps the most important "spiritual source" of a Native American's sense of place and identity. He strongly advocates the continued use of traditional native languages. However, he also reminds us that for hundreds of years the native peoples of the Americas have been multilingual. Before European colonization of the Americas, native peoples often "spoke not only their mother tongue but that of sister nations and cultures" (Coltelli 105). After colonization, native peoples added French, English, and Spanish to their repertoire of languages. A Native American's use of English, then, can be seen as the acquisition of another language and it cannot be argued that when a Native American uses the English language, he or she is forsaking his or her traditional culture. Moreover, it is a political reality that, in the United States, English has been forced for several generations on native peoples and that many no longer speak their native tongues. The "colonial experience did suppress the Native American voice," Ortiz insists, and English is the only language available to many Native

Americans. In their efforts to survive as a people, Ortiz argues, American Indians are necessarily transforming English, utilizing it as a Native American language; and since the 1960s, Native American writers have been using English in the process of decolonization (Cotelli 110).

In discussions of their work, the subject of language comes up repeatedly for Native American writers and they explain how the transformation of English into a Native American language occurs. Louise Erdrich notes that a Native American author's use of English often finds its roots in a "different heritage, background, a different worldview, a different mythology" (Cotelli 47). As the child of a Chippewa mother and German-American father, Erdrich's primary language was English but her worldview was shaped within a family that she characterizes as "probably a microcosm of tribal traditions" since family members with mixed tribal and European backgrounds were always "sitting around and telling stories" that had "evolved out of a set of shared memories" (Bonnetti 87). Erdrich's experience, then, was not unlike that of other Native American authors who grew up among some whose first language was English, some who were fluent in a tribal language and some who spoke, as Laguna writer and literary theorist Paula Gunn Allen has termed it, a "half-breed language" (Ballinger and Swann 7). Gunn Allen uses the experience of her own grandmother and mother to illustrate

what she means by "half-breed language." These Keres-speaking women, Gunn Allen tells interviewers Franchot Ballinger and Brian Swann, spoke "English, but . . . their association and understandings and expectations about a statement are . . . conditioned by their Laguna culture" (7).⁹ Like Gunn Allen, Laguna author Leslie Marmon Silko grew up "surrounded by people . . . talking and telling, relating incidents and stories" in both Keres and English (Silko, *Poetics* 23). Silko was punished in kindergarten if she spoke anything other than English and soon lost her ability to speak Keres but recalls that at home everything around her was still "conducted in the language that became repressed" and silenced outside the borders of her own community (Silko, *Poetics* 23).

Because they do not speak their traditional languages, Erdrich, Gunn Allen and Silko, must try to articulate repressed tribal worldviews in the English that Joy Harjo sometimes refers to as "the enemy's language." This process is a difficult one, observes Harjo, and confirms a Native American author's status on a "brutal border" (Harjo, *Poetics* 13, 11). Harjo explains that because of her own boarding school experience, she is not fluent in her native language and must work in English which is often "not tribal, not spiritual enough" to meet her needs (Brouchac, *Songs* 92). Like other writers of color in the Americas who are not linguistically comfortable in either English or the language

of their traditional cultures, Harjo finds herself inhabiting what Chicana poet and theorist Gloria Anzaldua has called a "borderland" between languages. At the junctures where cultures meet, Anzaldua finds hope that a hybrid language, a "language of the Borderlands" can be created and become "for some of us . . . a homeland" (55).¹⁰ But as Mikhail Bakhtin explains in The Dialogic Imagination, creating a "hybridized language" or forcing a language to submit to one's own intentions is a difficult process since language always exists in "other people's mouths, in other people's contexts, serving other people's intentions. . . . [and] it does not submit easily to seizure and transformation" (294).

However, as the linguistic experiences of Erdrich, Gunn Allen, Silko, and Harjo illustrate, living language always exists in what Bakhtin has termed the "elastic environment" of "dialogized heteroglossia" where the languages of the past and present, the languages of differing social and/or linguistic groups, and the languages of oral and written genres come into contact (Bakhtin 276, 272, 327). Bakhtin further explains that "It is precisely in living interaction with this specific environment" that a writer encounters the "multilanguagedness surrounding and nourishing his own consciousness" and finds the "embryonic beginnings of what is required" to "populate" language with his or her own intentions, to adapt "it to his [or her] own semantic and expressive intention" (361, 276,

347, 293). And though the transformation of language is difficult, Bakhtin sees the importance of the writer's struggle to perform this alchemy as "enormous." By questioning language and putting it in a "new situation," the writer gets a feel for the boundaries of language, exposes its weaknesses, and experiences it physically as an object. The result, writes Bakhtin, is that the writer comes to "ideological consciousness" and begins "to liberate [him or herself] from the authority of the other's discourse" (348). For Native Americans, as Erdrich, Harjo and Ortiz affirm, the stake in the process of "liberating" or transforming language is survival (Ortiz, Woven 360). For Native American writers, therefore, there is no other recourse but to proceed into that "elastic environment" about which Bakhtin speaks and to search for a "border" language that would allow oppressed peoples to emerge from an enforced silence that threatens to extinguish them as a linguistic and cultural group.

In her own work, Joy Harjo, like Anzaldua, demonstrates a hope that the "enemy's language" might be transformed into a "homeland." In a 1985 interview with Laura Coltelli, Harjo said that she is seeking a "place she doesn't yet have a language for;" but by drawing on a "wealth of memory" from her Creek heritage and oral traditions and by constantly thinking about what she, as a person with a Native American background, "can add to the [English] language," she is struggling to

create a "land-based language," a language capable of expressing "the spirit of place recognized" (Coltelli 63). But as Bakhtin points out, language is always in the mouths of other people, serving other people's intentions. Harjo notes that in the mouths of many Anglo-Europeans who came to colonize the American continent, English has been used, in a sense, to "pave over" the land. Explaining what she means by "paving over the land," Harjo adds that when Europeans first came to the American continent, they feared the land; for this reason, they could not hear what the earth had to say to them and they renamed the lands that Native Americans considered home a "wilderness." Then, with great rigor, they used their language to rename (and in this way dominate) everything non-European which they encountered in their new land (Coltelli 63).

Harjo tries to liberate English from its dominating intentions by dragging it into an "elastic environment" where stories from Native American oral traditions--ancient, historical, and contemporary--expose the ways in which the colonizer's tongue has been inhabited by colonizing intentions and used in the service of oppressing the peoples and lands of the Americas. In this borderland between languages, Harjo transgresses the boundaries of what has been said in English; here, she discovers silences, things that have never been said before in English, gaps in an authoritative, Eurocentric

language and the histories it has been used to record. She then inhabits these silences and gaps with stories and histories from Native American oral traditions which have not been articulated before in English, stories that acknowledge that the earth speaks to us if we will listen, stories that recognize that the earth is alive, as she tells Coltelli, because places are always "alive with names, alive with events" (63-64). By bringing the names and events from her spiritual source into her contemporary English-language poetry, Harjo brings together what Bakhtin describes as the languages of past and present and the languages of differing social groups and populates English words and sentences with her own semantic and expressive intentions. Harjo sees this kind of work as the effort to create a more "land-based" language.

For example, in "For Alva Benson and Those Who Have Learned to Speak," from She Had Some Horses, Harjo envisions this transformed, land-based language with roots so strong that it would fragment what she metaphorically describes as the "mortar and concrete" of a colonizing language which has been used to "pave over" the land. Harjo's new language would "let the ground speak." In this poem, a "child was born into their hands" and

grew up talking Navajo, in English
and watched the earth around her shift and change

with the people in the towns and in the cities
learning not to hear the ground as it spun around
beneath them. (18)

Unlike the people in her mother's world whose own mothers squatted near to the ground to give birth, the child in Harjo's poem is born in the Indian Hospital in Gallup, where the earth is covered with "mortar and concrete." The child grows up in a world where the people of the cities and towns no longer learn to hear the ground, they no longer know the names of the plants and the birds, no longer care about the stories associated with the land or the people who have lived and died on that land.

Nevertheless, this child can hear the "ground speaking." Despite a twentieth-century education in government-run schools where her native language is forbidden, she learns to speak "Navajo, in English," to "speak / both voices," to carry on her Navajo life and traditions through the use of the colonizer's language. In school, her teachers attempt to "pave over" the place she is from with the mortar and concrete of an authorized, Eurocentric vision of history, science, and religion, but she has listened to the elders who still call places by their ancient names and who acknowledge the voice of the earth by telling the stories from the oral tradition which are still associated with the places in their homeland where they occurred. And even though the historical reality of the

colonial experience means that she herself must tell these ancient stories which emerge from her people's spiritual source in English, they give her ways to think about the place in which she finds herself in the late twentieth century. These stories give her ways to actively struggle against the constraints of those institutional practices which are the legacy of Anglo-European colonization of the American continent.

Indeed, "For Alva Benson," illustrates that Harjo, like Simon Ortiz, is interested in how the continued use of the oral traditions which are a part of a writer's spiritual source or place is evidence that resistance to those colonizing forces that would suppress the Native American voice is ongoing. The child in "For Alva Bensen" hears the ancient stories, the ancient names "in her sleep. They change into other names," like "the harmonic motion of a child turning / inside her mother's belly waiting to be born / to begin another time" (Horses 18). For this child, the tribal stories and names have come to inhabit a new language. When she grows up and gives birth to her own daughter, she "strains against the metal stirrups" even when they "tie her hands down" (Horses 18) which implies that the child--now a woman--will pass on her new language, a language transformed by the fire of the colonial experience, to her child. Together, they will use this new language to resist those forces which would

suppress their voices and to speak not only of survival but of "another time" in which people deliver their children into a place beyond domination. In her struggle against the linguistically institutionalized oppression of colonization, the child/women/mother of Harjo's poem privileges the survival of her people and the stories that give them a sense of place and identity over any notion of a pure, original language or an "authentic" culture or myth. "[W]e go on," the poem concludes, "keep giving birth and watch / ourselves die, over and over. / And the ground spinning beneath us / goes on talking" (Horses 19).

By incorporating Native American oral traditions into a new language which offers the hope of moving people beyond domination and into "another time," Harjo is neither longing nostalgically for the past nor looking abstractedly at a romanticized future. She is well-acquainted with the difficulties about which Bakhtin speaks in his discussion of the complex process of transforming language. For Harjo, the difficulty of transforming English into a land-based language is that, in the mouths of those who have colonized the Americas, English has been used to perpetuate a deadly silence which has engulfed the incredible destruction and horrifying bloodshed of the last five-hundred years (Coltelli 63-64, Harjo, *Poetics* 22, 23). The American education system, asserts Harjo, "come[s] directly out of this . . . silence,"

this agreement that "We're not going to talk about it" (Harjo, Poetics 23).

This is why, Harjo explains, a transformed language will in no way be utopian, idyllic, or romantic. Indeed, in "Resurrection," from In Mad Love and War, Harjo describes this new language with the word "terrible." In this poem, Harjo writes of Nicaraguan lovers who touch and plan to meet, Contra soldiers who watch over what they fear, and mothers who give "away the clothes of their dead children." And beneath the sound of gunfire, it is possible to hear the dead talking, calling "out in words that sting / like bitter limes." The people who inhabit this Nicaraguan mountain village,

all watch for fire
for all the fallen dead to return
and teach us a language so terrible
it could resurrect us all. (17-18)

Asked in a seminar which she conducted at the University of Arizona why a life-giving language would be "terrible," Harjo explains that for 500 years, we have seen a horrifying "destruction of our home. . . . [I]t's an evil that is destroying land, creatures, . . . human beings, [and] cultures, . . . at mass levels" (Harjo, Poetics 29). In the Americas, from the decimation of the peaceful Arawok tribe to the Trail of Tears to the Reagan administration's covert activities in Nicaragua, the atrocities committed against the

indigenous peoples of the Americas "are not spoken," and this gaping "abyss" of silence enables the destruction and bloodshed that has occurred and is occurring to go on (Harjo, Poetics 22).

Harjo asks, "what happens, when you look into the terrifying abyss, hear the dead calling out, and decide to end the silence?" What happens if the only language in which you can articulate this vision is English? The process of transforming language may be difficult, it may be terrifying, but when the stake in this process is survival, then there is no other recourse but to proceed with the search for a "border" language that would allow the oppressed to emerge from the enforced silence that threatens to extinguish them as a culture and people. In discussions about why she proceeds with the difficult process of transforming language, Harjo, passionately declares that it is "terrifying,"

But what the hell, I'd rather be alive and walk through it terrified than to sit around anymore and just keep my mouth shut about it. This country is stunted until everyone . . . addresses that abyss in their own way and walks through it. . . . This has to do with everybody . . . not just Indian people. It's not just our loss, it's the loss of everyone in this country. And that has to be walked through in some way. (Harjo, Poetics 22)¹¹

Perhaps it is precisely this abyss of incredible loss

into which Louise Erdrich's character, Lipsha, is staring when he stops his blue Firebird on the border between the United States and Canada. Like the child in "For Alva Bensen," Lipsha does not possess the language of the "old ones" but he must somehow look into the terrifying abyss and, if he is to find a way to allow his people and culture to survive and go on, he must reclaim both the fragmented memories of his ancient culture and the memories of pain, suffering and triumph which his people have experienced in the last 500 years as well. He must reconstruct these fragments in ways that transform present reality. Indeed, before he can "come home," Lipsha must somehow learn, to use Harjo's words, to "walk through" this abyss, to move into a different mode of articulation, one that would be capable of delivering his people beyond domination and "into another time." Like Harjo, then, Erdrich is interested in how the use of the oral traditions which are a part of her spiritual source or place can transform the language she has come to use into a "homeland" in which the story of her people's resistance and survival can be told.

Lipsha's story is framed within the pages of a novel which celebrates Erdrich's cross-cultural Turtle Mountain Chippewa, Cree, French and German heritages. According to Bakhtin, the novel is a particularly fertile place in which to perform the alchemy of linguistic transformation. Language,

writes Bakhtin, "is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present" (291). Joyously aware of this heteroglossia, the novelist exploits the "multi-linguagedness surrounding and nourishing his own consciousness" and invites the languages of past and present, the languages of differing social and/or linguistic groups, and the languages of oral and written genres to come into contact within the space of the novel (361, 327). By choosing a strategy by which to organize these multiple languages, or in other words, by setting these languages within a framing context, the novelist creates the "image" of a new language (361). Bakhtin uses the word "image" because "differing linguistic consciousnesses" can never actually be fully fused (361). Rather, the novel's organization and style create the "image" of a new language, a language which creates a space for "bringing different languages in contact with one another, a system having as its goal the illumination of one language by means of another" (361, emphasis Bakhtin's).

Bakhtin explains that one of the most basic and fundamental ways that novelists organize this "multi-linguagedness" into the image of a new language is by incorporating various artistic and non-artistic genres such as

songs, poems, oral stories, legends, travel notes, letters, etc. into the structure of their novels. "Such incorporated genres," writes Bakhtin, "usually preserve within the novel their own structural integrity and independence, as well as their own linguistic and stylistic peculiarities" (321). Indeed, it is by incorporating the traditional genres of a different epoch into their poetry and novels that Native American writers are transforming English into a language that articulates their identity or place. Since the "spiritual source" of one's sense of place, according to Ortiz, is not only one's physical or geographical location but also the stories of life and creation that helped form one's identity, Native Americans bring a sense of place into their contemporary writing by incorporating ancient and historical genres--with many of their structural and linguistic peculiarities intact--into their contemporary "plots and characters" (Coltelli 109). And though these stories may be written in English and set in contemporary times, argues Ortiz, they are still connected to the author's "spiritual source" and therefore still express his or her sense of place (Coltelli 105).

Love Medicine is an excellent example of how a novel written in English can become a "new" language which grows out of the author's "spiritual source." Erdrich infuses Love Medicine with a rich sense of place by setting her novel in

contemporary times on the Turtle Mountain reservation near the American-Canadian border and by transforming the "multi-languaged" Chippewa stories that she heard while growing up into the characters and structure of her novel. Narrated by a community of characters who speak as if they were sitting around and gossiping, the novel is consciously shaped, Erdrich explains, to resemble "story-telling in the Native American tradition" (Bonnetti 90). Like Erdrich's own family members who were always "sitting around and telling stories," each of the character/narrators--Nector Kashpaw, Marie Kashpaw, Lulu Lamartine, and Lipsha--is led back into "a shared set of memories" (Bonnetti 87) after hearing about the death of Lipsha's mother, June Kashpaw--and one story leads to another.

Erdrich roots each of her character/narrator's stories in two types of traditional Chippewa or Anishinabe¹² tales--news and tidings stories and stories of sacred mythical characters. According to ethnographer A. Irving Hallowell, Chippewa "news and tidings" stories are brief and episodic since the audience is already familiar with the characters, their cultural context, and the values to which these characters adhere; Hallowell adds that these stories are about the lives of human beings and "range from everyday occurrences" to those which have sacred mythical characters wandering through them and which "verge on the legendary" (150).

The second type of stories, according to Erdrich, are

tales about the sacred mythical characters, or the manitou. These stories are told in cycles and leave "something hanging so that the characters can then come back and go onward" (Bonnetti 90). The manitou are "regarded as living entities who have existed from time immemorial" but have never been thought of as impersonal beings. They interact frequently with human beings and like to hear tales told about themselves (Hallowell 150). Because of the manitou's interactions with humans, no sharp distinction can be made between "news and tidings" stories and stories about the manitou; so it is not surprising that Erdrich implies that several of her human characters, including June Kashpaw, Nector Kashpaw and Gerry Nanapush, could also be manitou or that Erdrich leaves these characters hanging in some "news and tidings" stories so that they can come back in others.

June, for example, is an often recurring presence in the novel since it is news of her death which occasions many of the character/narrators' stories. June, who was raised by Marie Kashpaw, was discovered in the woods as a young girl "[sucking] on pine sap and [grazing] on grass and [nipping] on buds like a deer" (LM 65). Because they have no idea how she survived for so long in the woods, the community speculates that she must be "the child of what the old people called Manitous, invisible ones who live in the woods" (LM 65). She marries a man who beats her. "He used the flat of his hand.

He hit me good" (LM 16). June ends up leaving the reservation for a life in which she must continually scrape for money from "rich, single cowboy-rigger oil trash" (LM 8).

As a character, June embodies the contradictions inherent in a world changed by five-hundred years of colonization. She is clearly associated with the timeless Chippewa manitou and yet she must struggle for her very existence. June's world is not a comfortable place to live in. Racism, sexism, poverty and exploitation are prominent features of this landscape; but June's memories of what she learned in the woods, from "the old time people," that underneath we are "pure and naked," that we are separated from the world of the manitou only by skins that are "stiff and old" (LM 4), give her ways to think about her situation, to struggle and resist, to "get through this again" (LM 4).

June is an excellent example of how Erdrich in particular and Native American authors in general bring a sense of place into their work to create a transformed language. In a Bakhtinian sense, June is a "new language" which, like living discourse itself, embodies the contradictory languages of the past and present, the languages of differing social and/or linguistic groups, and the languages of multiple oral and written genres. By associating June with the ancient manitou, yet placing her squarely in an oil-rigger boom town where the dominant culture often represents Indian women as "nothing but

an easy night" (LM 9), Erdrich calls attention to the ways in which the discourses of dominant cultures claim the authority to represent people of other cultures and how this can result in stereotyping, essentialization, and colonization. But by thinking of her connection to the manitou, June goes back to her "spiritual source" and finds ways to resist those who would claim the authority to represent her.

Erdrich is not romanticizing the "languages" of the past. June's difficult life and untimely death remind readers of all those who have not survived what Lipsha calls "the outright germ warfare and dirty-dog killing of the whites" (LM 195). Indeed, Erdrich makes it clear that there can be no innocent or unpoliticized remembrance of the "old ones." But Erdrich also writes that June has "aged hard in every way but how she moved" (LM 1), implying that the power of the Chippewa's ancient culture and traditional lifeways have certainly been changed by the conflagration, but the power survives, is moving forward, and has something to offer to contemporary people. This is a "language" which, in the words of Ortiz, energizes the "process of decolonization" by calling colonialist discourses and domination into question to such a degree that it becomes necessary to resist and deconstruct them (Coltelli 110).

June's ability to find strategies for resistance in her traditional culture, reflects Erdrich's interest in how the

languages of the past can be brought forward into the present to question and resist discourses which represent themselves as indisputably authoritative. An authoritative discourse, according to Bakhtin, permits no play with its borders and seeks to "remain sharply demarcated" (343). Moreover, the

authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. . . . It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. (342)

But when the authoritative, colonizing word--whether this is a stereotype, a "pure" language, or, to use Said's term, an "orientalized" myth of origin--is dragged into "a zone of contact," the possibilities for "newer ways to mean" are revealed (Bakhtin 346). Erdrich drags authoritative, stereotyping, colonizing discourses into the contact zone of her novel and there permits endless play between the discourses of the past and present, between Chippewa, French, Cree and English social and linguistic groups, and between oral and written genres. She allows each of these languages to inhabit the gaps, fissures and silences of the others because, as theorist Donna Haraway puts it, "each reveals dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point" (154).

Like the stories about June, other "news and tidings"

stories in Love Medicine are "languages" which bring memories of the past into the present to challenge and resist colonizing discourses. Each of the character/narrators of the novel liberally weaves tales of personal everyday occurrences or "news and tidings" into his or her memories of June and find spaces for resistance not only in their traditional cultures but also in the very colonialist discourses, cultures and practices which often seek to stereotype or "place" Indians as a "dying but noble race." As Haraway writes, contesting for the power to represent one's self and one's culture is "a major form of contemporary political struggle" (175); and each of these characters' stories tell of the struggle for a language in which to tell their own story of daily resistance and survival from their own perspective.

For example, in recounting some of his youthful employment experiences, Nector Kashpaw, who is often associated with one of the sacred, manitou hero twins in Chippewa mythology, recalls his days as an actor. Obviously, Nector informs the reader, the movie director "didn't know I was a Kashpaw, because right off I had to die" (LM 89). "Death was the extent of Indian acting" (LM 90), Nector concludes; and so, he quits the movies. On another occasion, Nector is paid two-hundred dollars by a rich, old, white lady to pose naked for her painting, "The Plunge of the Brave." "Later on," Nector recalls, "that picture would become famous.

It would hang in the Bismark state capital. There I was, jumping off a cliff, naked of course, down into a rocky river. Certain death" (LM 91). Again Nector concludes that "the greater world is only interested in my doom" (LM 91).

Resisting the rich, old white lady's racist representation of him, Nector recalls Melville's Moby Dick as he visualizes his miraculous escape.

I knew that Nector Kashpaw would fool the pitiful rich woman that painted him and survive the raging water. I'd hold my breath when I hit and let the current pull me toward the surface, around jagged rocks. I wouldn't fight it, and in that way I'd get to the shore. (LM 91)

After his vision, Nector declares, "Call me Ismael. . . . For he survived the white whale like I got out of the rich lady's picture" (LM 91).

Just as Lipsha's blue Firdbird facilitated the border-crossing which leads to his vision, Nector's stint in the movies and his reading of Moby Dick give him insight into the dominant culture's two favorite representations of Indian people. Either, as Custer put it, "The only good Indian is a dead Indian" or, as the rich, white lady sees it, Indians are a dying but noble race (LM 91). Lipsha's and Nector's news and tidings, then, are that Native American peoples have survived precisely because they have been able to undermine

romanticized stereotypes and tell their own story from their own perspective, straddle two or more cultures, seize any tool useful in the struggle against racist and colonialist mentalities--and, of course, find humor in their situations. Whether the tools of survival are healing ceremonies or fast cars, ancient myths or American novels, the Mischif language or English, Lipsha and Nector demonstrate that members of living, surviving, ongoing cultures, as Erdrich tells Bonnetti, are intelligently able to take "bits and pieces of another culture and [work] them into the fabric of [their own] culture" (97).

News and tidings stories often take the form of community gossip in Love Medicine. Erdrich shows how these stories can be an act of resistance and used in the practice of daily survival. As Leslie Silko tells interviewer Larry Evers, in Native American communities, "Gossip is not just idle rumor or trivial chatter. . . . These stories [are] about goings-on, about what people are up to" (29). Stories affirm one's place and identity within the family and community, and as Silko further explains, community and "family stories" are "just as important as the other stories--the older stories. [T]hey are . . . a very critical part of one's childhood" because they have the power to help "the individual in crisis" (Silko, "Land" 58, 60). Lipsha Morrissey would agree with Silko's assessment of gossip stories; while stopped on the bridge over

the American/Canadian border, he clearly informs the reader that his vision and power--indeed, his survival--has often depended on remembering things he has "heard gossiped over" (LM 195).

By remembering community "news and tidings" stories, Marie Kashpaw, illustrates how gossip can be an act of resistance and how words can be used to "protects her plans" for herself and for her family's future (LM 70). Marie uses the gossip that she has collected in town to restore her slightly tarnished identity as wife of tribal chairman, Nector Kashpaw. A group of "old hens" with "seven senses for scandal" are cackling around the kitchen table about Marie's philandering husband. But she turns "the table on them." In a lively exchange, she reminds one "old cow" that her "man goes to [Lulu] Lamartine's house with a bagged bottle." She casually asks another, "How's your son? Too bad he crossed the border. I heard he had to go. Are you taking in his newborn?" (LM 70). By putting the "old cows" in their place, Marie, who is still haunted by her "no good" Lazarre lineage, reestablishes her own communal identity and sense of place. She demonstrates how memory and stories of everyday occurrences can be put into the daily practice of survival to help individuals deal with difficult personal crises.

Gerry Nanapush's recurring presence in many "news and tidings" stories, his outrageous social behavior, his amazing

escapes from prison, his ready humor and his family name of Nanapush clearly indicate that he is the most recent manifestation of the sacred Chippewa trickster Nanabozho who is considered one of the manitou. As a trickster-figure, Gerry is both foolish and shrewd, too smart for his own good, and hard to categorize. Gerry's son Lipsha describes his father's paradoxical reputation this way:

famous politicking hero, dangerous armed criminal, judo expert, escape artist, charismatic member of the American Indian Movement, and smoker of many pipes of kinnikinnick in the most radical groups. That was . . . Dad. (LM 248)

Arrested for kicking a racist cowboy "in the balls," Gerry is given a three year sentence which is "heavy for a first offense, but not bad for an Indian" (LM 162). He is offered time off for good behavior but boasts that "no steel or concrete shitbarn could hold a Chippewa" and uses his "eellike properties" to break out. Caught, he begins to serve time "mainly for breaking out . . . regular as clockwork" (LM 160). "So you see," Erdrich's character/narrator concludes, "it was difficult for Gerry, as an Indian, to retain the natural good humor of his ancestors in these modern circumstances" (LM 163).

Simon Ortiz explains that trickster tales have always been told orally in Native American communities but that it

has only been since the 1960s that they have been written and published with their more contemporary qualities. Western colonialist practices have created the necessity for Native American communities to find ways to "express certain political and cultural . . . positions, to define and identify more closely the truth, to squash stereotypes and replace them with the real thing" (Coltelli 110). By bringing this very ancient genre of "resistance literature" into her contemporary novel, Louise Erdrich creates a character who not only outthinks and outsmarts unjust governmental systems but by his wits, intelligence and creative nature, overcomes overwhelming odds. Gerry becomes more than just a means of speaking for survival; Gerry transforms stories of the past into a contemporary language which speaks of moving beyond domination.

When Gerry escapes one more time, Lipsha takes the blue Firebird he has won from his half-brother, King, in a poker game and delivers Gerry to freedom across the Canadian border. The car, which was purchased with the insurance money received after June's death, has become so associated with June by all the character/narrators of Love Medicine that it seems like the embodiment of June's soul, almost as if "it was wired up to something. As if it might give off a shock when touched" (LM 22). Indeed the car seems to sail through the novel on the river of memories of each individual narrator. When

Lipsha returns from Canada to the United States and crosses the bridge over the "last of an ancient ocean" to bring "her [June?] home" (LM 272), the reader begins to understand that in Love Medicine, as in other contemporary Native American writing, the process of "coming home" entails a process of using language to gather and reconstruct fragmented memories in ways that transform the present and work to move colonized peoples beyond colonialist domination. As the child of both June and Gerry, both of whom is associated with the "old ones" or manitou but neither of whom is a speaking character/narrator in the novel, Lipsha literally illustrates Erdrich's devotion to telling about the lives she sees "stretching back, breaking, surviving somehow, and incredibly culminating in somebody who can tell a story" (Bonnetti 98). When Lipsha crosses the bridge and "comes home," he brings the power and vision of his ancient tribal traditions into his contemporary present and into the "Border language" that he has "come to use." He makes the connection between memory, language and survival clear as he overcomes the silence forced upon the "old ones" by colonialist systems of education and government. He is "alive to tell the tale" (LM 202) of those like June who are part of the vital, ongoing story which grows out of the place the Chippewa inhabit, the story of the Chippewa manitou, and the story of the Chippewa people. He is alive to tell the story of those like Gerry who expose the

dominations of the past and reveal the possibilities for moving beyond domination--and most importantly, like all the character/narrators of Love Medicine, Lipsha is alive to tell this story from his own perspective.

In the contemporary work of Native American writers, then, there is an explicit connection between place and the oral tradition and the ongoing struggle being waged by the indigenous peoples of the Americas. These writers are creating a new language which may resemble "the enemy's language" but which has undergone an irrevocable transformation. In a sense, these writers are creating a linguistic "homeland" where stories which are connected to the writer's spiritual source--stories of the ancient gods who once interacted frequently with humans, stories from the continuously growing body of oral stories which speak crucially about the experience of colonization, stories of everyday occurrences, and even gossip--challenge colonial discourse to ensure that the terrible silences which have masked the destruction of the peoples and cultures and lands of the Americas get spoken and that Native American histories and cultures get remembered and rewritten in ways that transform the present and work to move peoples beyond domination to continuance. To label this new language as somehow "inauthentic," argues Simon Ortiz, is to fail to acknowledge that the contemporary writing of Native Americans

is a creative response to forced colonization. "There is not a question of authenticity here," Ortiz writes. Rather, the writings of Native Americans must be seen as a form of "resistance; there is no clearer word for it than resistance" (Ortiz, National 10). Clearly and boldly, Native American writers demonstrates that they privilege the survival of their people and the stories that give them a sense of place and identity over any imagined notion of a pure, original language or an "authentic" culture or myth.

Notes

1. From the Preface to Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza (np).

2. In Mad Love and War (18).

3. MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literatures of the United States. 8.2 (Summer 1981). (10).

4. Lipsha is the son of trickster/activist/culture-hero Gerry Nanapush, the grandson of Lulu and the powerful medicine man Old Man Pillager and the great-grandson of Fleur, the central character in Erdrich's novel, Tracks. For more on both Lipsha's and Fleur's medicine powers see Joni Adamson Clarke, "Why Bears are Good to Think and Theory Doesn't Have to be Murder."

5. Love Medicine (248). Subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically as LM, with page numbers in the text.

6. As Michael Dorris, Erdrich's husband and creative collaborator, tells Laura Coltelli, the Turtle Mountain Chippewa speak a language that is heavily mixed with French and Cree and called Mischif (Coltelli 43). Lipsha's name (a Michif bastardization of the French le petit chou) literally reflects the change that has occurred in his homeland since Europeans first began to have interactions with Native Americans in North America 500 years ago.

7. In "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness," African American literary theorist bell hooks writes that "in much new, exciting cultural practice, cultural texts . . . there is an effort to"

create spaces where one is able to redeem and reclaim the past, legacies of pain, suffering, and triumph in ways that transform present reality. Fragments of memory are . . . constructed to move us into a different mode of articulation. We see . . . a politicization of memory that distinguishes nostalgia, that longing for something to be as once it was, a kind of useless act, from that remembering that serves to illuminate and transform the present. (147)

8. For more on the Native American Boarding School system see Kirk and Lynn Kickingbird's "A Short History of Indian Education" (Parts I and II) and Jeff Hamley's "Cultural Genocide in the Classroom."

9. In The Ethnography of Communication, Muriel Saville-Troike notes that within each community "there is a variety of language codes and ways of speaking available to its members" (51) and members of a multilingual community

have often learned about some topics through the medium of one language and other topics through the medium of the second, and thus may only know the vocabulary to discuss a topic in one of their languages, or feel it is more "natural" to use one language for a particular topic. (53)

Saville-Troike adds that in conditions where minority group members may be bilingual in their own ethnic language and the dominant language or where minority group members are monolingual in the dominant language and wish to remain identified with their cultural group, "linguistic markers" such as "choice of lexical items and syntactic forms" are often developed and maintained (85, 86).

10. In Borderlands/La Frontera, Anzaldua speaks of her experience growing up on the Texas/Mexican border. In school she was made to feel ashamed of her Spanish accent when she spoke English and her Mexican accent when she spoke Spanish. In her writing she freely switches between English, Spanish, Tex-Mex without translating and declares, "I will no longer be made to feel ashamed of existing. I will have my voice" (59).

11. In Harjo's University of Arizona "Poetics and Politics" classroom presentation, seminar participant Linda Bolton made this comment on Harjo's explanation of why a transformed language would be "terrible": "[M]aybe it's the struggle of learning how to craft and then speak, a new language that would make it clear that it was all of our loss. . . . How do you find a language or create a language in which all of us speak and recognize that connectedness

that's there?" (Harjo, Poetics 23-24).

12. According to Gerald Vizenor, the Chippewa are also called the Ojibwa but are more correctly called the Anishinabeg, which is a collective name referring to those who speak the same woodland language (13).

Chapter Three
A Place to See: From "Early American" Almanacs
to Almanac of the Dead

No one who would truly understand American literature may by any means turn away, in lofty literary scorn, from the almanac, --most despised, most prolific, most indispensable of books, which every man uses, and no man praises; the very quack, clown, pack-horse, and pariah of modern literature.

--Moses Coit Tyler¹

Indians never regarded the natural world as if it were separate from their own lives.

--Rigoberta Menchu²

Here we are, the dead of all times, dying once again, but now with the objective of living.

-- Subcomandante Marcos³

The great struggle is to make whatever language you have really speak for you.

--Leslie Silko⁴

On January 6, 1994, as I was writing this chapter, a local television station in Tucson, Arizona, aired an interview with author Leslie Marmon Silko on its 10:00 news program.⁵ On New Year's Day 1994, reported Lupita Murrillo to her television viewers, rebels calling themselves the Zapatista National Liberation Army took over San Cristobal de la Casas and three other sizeable towns in Chiapas, once an important region in the great Mayan empire but now the poorest state of modern-day Mexico. By calling themselves "Zapatistas," explained Murrillo, the rebels were honoring Emiliano Zapata, the hero of the Mexican Revolution who called for land reform and redistribution. Clearly, the name

"Zapatistas" associated the New Year's Day uprising with the indigenous fight for land which has been ongoing since the Spanish conquest of the Mayan and Aztec empires.⁶ Murrillo explained that in Silko's most recent novel, Almanac of the Dead, an indigenous army gathers in Tuxtla Gutierrez which is near San Cristobal de las Casas. Following hero twins who believe that "With the return of Indian land would come the return of justice, followed by peace,"⁷ this army begins to march north to retake lands that have been stolen from Native American peoples. Murrillo had come to Silko's home in the Tucson mountains, she told her audience, to ask if Silko saw Almanac of the Dead, which was published in 1991, as a prediction of the uprising in Chiapas.

Silko told Murrillo that she had a dream in 1981 in which the Mayan peoples of the Chiapas region figured prominently. In this dream, she saw "a great battle in this hemisphere" which grew out of the "hundreds of years of exploitation of the Native American people."⁸ Silko explained that the Mayan people's 1994 uprising is rooted in a history of colonization and repression and ongoing resistance to that repression; Silko emphasized that it should come as no surprise that a people like the Mayans who have experienced some of the harshest repression in Mexico but who have always exhibited a strong "fighting spirit" and who have never been willing to "give up their lands or culture" would arise and claim their

right to a landbase that would allow them to continue as a people and a culture.⁹ In the sense that she saw a revolt in the Chiapas region as inevitable and incorporated this foresight into her novel, Almanac of the Dead could be said to be a "prediction" of the 1994 New Year's Day revolt.

When Almanac of the Dead was published in 1991, however, no one was aware that later events in Mexico would render Silko's text so uncannily plausible that reporters would scramble up to her Tucson Mountain ranch for an appreciative interview. Indeed, early reviews of the novel in news publications were scathingly critical. Reviewers were aghast over the intimidating length of Silko's book, its daunting cast of over 70 characters, and the innumerable plots and subplots through which these characters move. What, reviewers wanted to know, was the celebrated Laguna Pueblo author, an author who had been honored with a prestigious MacArthur Foundation Fellowship, doing when she published this unwieldy collection of seemingly unrelated narratives about revolutionary Mayan hero twins, Yaqui medicine women, shady bio-technologists and secretive scientists? Where, reviewer Alan Ryan of USA Today wondered, was that "special insight into the lives and minds of Native Americans" that we have come to expect from books like Ceremony, Storyteller, and Laguna Woman? There is neither "special insight" nor "novelistic merit" in any of Silko's 763 pages, Ryan warns,

and readers would do well to stay away from this "unholy mess" of narratives about "society's misfits: drugheads and dope dealers, rapists, murderers, gunrunners, people who make films of dissections and abortions, . . . and opportunistic real-estate developers."¹⁰

More perceptively, reviewer Elizabeth Tallent of the New York Times acknowledges that Silko's book is pervaded with bloody and violent images, but argues that it is "a form of meditation" upon the "cruelty of contemporary America."¹¹ But I will argue in this chapter that Almanac of the Dead is more than just a "meditation," more than just a New-Age-type prediction of future events in Mexico, and more than just an "unholy mess." Indeed, it is somewhat ironic that by beginning his catalogue of Silko's "unholy" characters with drugdealers and rapists and ending with "opportunistic real-estate developers," Ryan's dismissive review unwittingly links those who commit crime and sexual violence to those who do violence to the Earth. This is exactly the connection that Silko wants her readers to make. We must understand, Silko told an audience gathered to discuss Almanac of the Dead, that the countless acts of rape, murder, mutilation, racial discrimination, and ecological destruction which have occurred everyday since the colonization of the Americas began 500 hundred years ago "are intertwined" ("Poetics" 51-53).

I argue in this chapter, and in the chapter that follows,

that Almanac of the Dead goes beyond a simple "meditation on cruelty" to become a brilliant analysis of how the oppressions of the earth, colonized peoples, and women are all rooted in a logic of domination which undergirds what Silko has described as the "death orientation that . . . permeates the times we live in."¹² Key to Silko's analysis is a rejection of the notion that domination, injustice and violence are inevitable. Unlike other American writers such as Cooper, Thoreau, and Faulkner who lament the unjust treatment of Native Americans and African Americans and the alarmingly rapid destruction of American lands but who see the march of "progress" as inevitable, the "machine in the garden" as unstoppable, Silko presents the earth and colonized peoples not as helpless victims of progress but as alive, responsive, and resistant.

I argue in this chapter that like feminist historians of science Carolyn Merchant and Donna Haraway who theorize about how we might work to end the interconnected oppressions of the earth, colonized peoples, and women, Leslie Silko creates Almanac of the Dead as a place in which to theorize about how people of all races and cultures might move beyond a logic which dictates that domination is the necessary relation of "human nature" to the rest of the world. In chapter two, I examine Silko's critique of the ways in which one of the most powerful modern discourses--the discourse of science--has been

used to discount local peoples, cultures, and ecologies and to justify and further the often violent objectives of colonialism. Heeding Silko's own insistence that readers who would begin to understand her project must put aside ambiguous notions of "novelistic merit" and read her book--as the title clearly indicates--as an almanac, I begin my discussion with an examination of the "early American" almanacs and the ancient Mayan almanacs on which Silko models her text.¹³

II

In a discussion of Almanac of the Dead which she gave in the Spring of 1992, Leslie Silko acknowledged that the ten years she had spent writing her novel were extremely difficult for her personally because she had been trying to grapple with the genocide, violence, and displacement experienced by indigenous peoples during the five-hundred years of colonialism in the Americas and to understand how this violence is connected to the "great changes in the weather and the earth" which have occurred during the same period of time.¹⁴ After sending her manuscript off to the publisher, she tried to rest, to avoid the television and newspapers, and to reestablish a sense of personal balance by "dragging out [her] Buddhism books" (Poetics" 21). But

around the time . . . when I was reading Buddhism and . . . thinking about the larger picture and the long haul, almost as if in answer to me there was the killing of the

nine Buddhists up near Phoenix, [Arizona]. ("Poetics" 22)¹⁵

The senseless murder of nine Buddhists from Thailand by one Anglo/Thai and one Hispanic teenager confirmed for Silko what she had been thinking about while writing Almanac of the Dead--that we are living in a time of violence so pervasive that it respects no national borders and involves people of all races and cultures. Silko concluded that we can't just closet ourselves with our Buddhist books and expect it to get any better. We need to try to find ways to deal with this violence and to "try to see ways in which people can live though this . . . time of great, great upheaval" ("Poetics" 22).

This is exactly what Silko tries to do in Almanac of the Dead. While writing the novel, she was reading and clipping newspaper articles about "incredibly destructive things"--rapes, ethnic violence, oil spills, murders similar to the Buddhists'--and reports such as these influence the shape she decided to give her novel ("Poetics" 21-22). She needed a narrative frame that would allow her to examine the roots of contemporary society's "death orientation" and to explore the possibilities for working towards smaller, less violent, more socially and ecologically balanced communities.¹⁶ Silko was well aware that, for more than 2000 years, when individuals of various cultures, including the Egyptians, Romans, and

Chinese, wanted to understand changes in the weather and the earth, ascertain how these changes affected them personally, and predict how they could bring themselves and their land into a more positive, harmonious relationship with the universe, they consulted the astrological, calendrical, meteorological, and agricultural information compiled in their almanacs.¹⁷ The use of the almanac as a narrative frame, then, allows Silko to write with an eye towards seeing "how we might live through [our] times" (Poetics 22). Like the theories of Donna Haraway, which are written to "orient, to provide the roughest sketch for travel," to "produce a patterned vision of how to move and what to fear in the topography of an impossible but all-too-real present in order to find an absent, but perhaps possible, other present,"¹⁸ Silko's use of the almanac is a move which allows her to theorize about past, present, and future. Already, the 1994 uprising of Mayan peoples in Chiapas, Mexico, lends a certain credibility to some of Silko's theories about the future of the Americas.

All of the narratives in Almanac of the Dead and the numerous characters who people them revolve around and are part of the "almanac" which Silko creates at the center of her novel. The "almanac" is a collection of narratives, ancient parchment fragments, and miscellaneous information that has been kept secret for generations and passed from one "keeper

of the almanac" to the next (A 152). One of "keepers" is Old Yoeme, a Yaqui curandera or medicine woman who has somehow survived a cruel Mexican dictatorship and the Mexican revolution to become one of the few chosen to protect the sacred, secret record of her people's ancient knowledge.¹⁹ Sensing she is nearing death, Old Yoeme passes the almanac down to her twin granddaughters, Lecha and Zeta, and explains to them that the ancient stories contained in the almanac tell the people "who they were and where they had come from" (A 246). When Lecha inspects the almanac more closely, she discovers that it is made up of several old, dilapidated notebooks, fragments of parchment covered with strange hieroglyphic markings, stacks of newspaper clippings, yellowed papers scrawled with an unfamiliar, classical Spanish script, and blank pages. Upon further examination, Lecha discovers that Yoeme has filled up a page in the almanac which had been left blank with the story of her own miraculous escape in 1918 from a Mexican prison where she had been jailed for "high treason against the federal government" but mostly because she was "an Indian woman who kicked dirt in the faces of the police and army" (A 579).²⁰ Lecha notices that Yoeme has also scribbled arguments spiced with the "vulgar humor Lecha and Zeta had enjoyed so many times with their grandmother" (A 570). Other sections of the almanac have been lost while some sections have "been stolen from . . . the proliferation of

'farmer's almanacs' published by patent-drug companies" (A 570).

These stolen sections of "farmers almanacs" root Yoeme's almanac in a consciousness that is foreign to many of Silko's late twentieth-century readers. Farmers almanacs were first published in colonial America in 1639, a time when most Euro-American colonists lived in a world still dominated by the Renaissance belief that the earth was animate and responsive, a human being writ large with whom the individual could have an intimate, personal relationship (Stowell vii).²¹ As Carolyn Merchant explains in her discussion of the "ecological revolution" which took place in New England in the first two centuries of European colonization of North America, most colonists--educated and uneducated alike--believed that "Nature, personified as animate mother, carried out God's dictates in the phenomenal world" (Ecological 114).²² Colonists believed that land was a living thing that had to be nursed and humored and that the sun, moon, and stars influenced both the human body and the earth's body. For this reason, a good farmer must understand and work within the celestial cycles and approach nature mimetically so that the land could be made to yield and the soil could be healed. By mimicking nature's actions--watching the seasons closely, planting when elm leaves reached the size of a mouse's ear, observing changes in plants, predicting rain by watching ants

carry eggs out of their nest, dancing in the fields to encourage fertility, etc.--colonists hoped for a sympathetic response to their entreaties (Ecological 116-117). This is precisely why the slim, four-by-seven inch, sixteen-page almanacs were so popular; they were the main printed source of information about the natural world, they described ancient planting rituals, and they included the astrological information colonists needed to bring themselves and their land into a more positive, harmonious relationship with the cosmos.²³

Almanac-makers quickly discovered that of the "proliferation" of almanacs,²⁴ the best selling were those which included the astrological calendar, farming rituals, weather forecasts, local maps, and court schedules which colonists relied upon daily (Butler 321). Because most colonial people still believed that both celestial bodies and one's literal, geographical place on the earth played a role in personal destiny and world events, almanac-makers included in their almanacs a twelve-month astrological calendar called the "ephemeris" which was deemed essential information by most American colonists.²⁵ An ephemeris was calculated according to the position of the stars and planets for the locale in which the almanac was sold and other information included in the almanac along with the ephemeris--like essays and verses--also tended to reflect local differences in culture and

attitude between larger geographical regions. Colonists could use the astrological and communal information in their almanacs to cast personal horoscopes, determine when to harvest herbs with which to make healing remedies, sow crops at the most astrally advantageous times, and plan their monthly schedules. Colonial almanacs, then, were written for local populations and almanac-makers had to take local knowledges--information that was communally, politically, and ecologically pertinent to the local area--seriously if they wanted their almanac to sell well (Butler 328-330, Stowell 273).

Renaissance beliefs and practices associated with the sun, moon, and soil which were carried to America were a venerable tradition not easily challenged and one that was upheld by farmers almanacs (Ecological 133); but gradually, in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, a colonial cosmology and consciousness that depicted the earth as animate and responsive began to be challenged by the "new science" of Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, and Isaac Newton which was based on the analogy that God was a mathematician and the cosmos a machine. Merchant explains that elite American scientists, improvers, clergy, doctors, industrialists, and market farmers--educated in the "new science" at Harvard or in European universities--began to argue for a market economy and the new mechanistic worldview

which supported capitalist industrialization. The writers and publishers of colonial American almanacs, many of whom were either Harvard graduates or well-educated printers, physicians, and public-minded entrepreneurs,²⁶ also supported the effort to establish a market economy and began arguing that nature should be harnessed for profit. But as long as the earth was considered alive and sensitive, the nurturer of all living things, the womb in which metals grew and ripened, "it could be considered a breach of human ethical behavior to carry out destructive acts against it" (Death 3, 4). So colonial elites began to try to wean subsistence farmers away from their belief in an animate earth and to hurry them "forward" into the "new science." Using the "new science" to support their argument, colonial elites and their spokespersons the almanac-makers began reconstructing nature not as animate mother but as inert commodity (Ecological 23).

While continuing to publish the astrological information and farming rituals which the common people clamored for, almanac-makers began including essays which purged the cosmos of animism and characterized human beings, according to Merchant, "not as imitators who followed in nature's footsteps, but as masters of its processes" (Ecological 127, 200). However, the debate about the nature of the earth continued within the pages of American almanacs throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, since "the

new science" was by no means universally accepted; indeed, the lack of agreement on the subject was reflected by the fact that opposing views were sometimes printed together in the same almanac (Stowell 163, Ecological 134). And while colonists might not dare to dispute the scriptures they found in their Bible or add their own personal histories to that authoritative Christian text, they often felt free to record the events of their daily lives on blank pages or to scribble objections such as "A Damd Lye" in the margins of their almanacs next to paragraphs explaining concepts such as "The Divisibility of Matter" (Stowell 44, xii).

By including sections of the Euro-American colonizers' almanacs in an almanac passed down through generations of Native Americans who have added their own personal histories or annotated the margins with arguments (or, occasionally, vulgar humor), Old Yoeme and other "keepers of the almanac" are engaged in a seeming contradiction. They are using colonialist discourses in their fight against colonialist domination. The keepers deliberately transgress the boundaries of what Edward Said has called the "orientalist" stereotype of the "oral primitive" not only by learning to read Euro-American farmers' almanacs but by selectively adding to their own almanac those sections which they believe can be of use to them in their fight to survive and 'return as a people' (A 246). They recognize that Europeans have been most

anxious to take control of their lands; therefore, there is a link between the fight for survival and justice and the fight for land; more specifically, the "keepers" recognize as their enemies all those who have realized any kind of "wealth from doing something terrible . . . to the earth" (A 34). Keepers like Lecha and Zeta observe that twentieth-century Euroamerican peoples depict the earth as a commodity which can be exploited for profit and laugh at indigenous peoples for their belief that the earth is animate and that rain clouds, mountains, and trees should be worshipped (A 628). The keepers have seen and recorded how the insistence that the earth is inanimate has led "greedy destroyers of the land" to rip "open Mother Earth;" they deem these actions a "crime against all living things" (A 35) and recognize that they must search for the means to resist colonialist domination not only in their own people's ancient culture but also in the colonizer's culture.

Those sections of late seventeenth-century American almanacs which employ earth mother imagery in profusion or advise colonists about how to make healing herbal remedies could be useful in a fight for land and justice because they support the keepers' own beliefs about the earth as animate, responsive "Mother" (A 625). But sections of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century almanacs which advise colonists to see the earth as commodity and to master nature's processes

for profit would also be useful in the fight against colonialist practices because they show how European consciousness about "Nature" has been deliberately constructed over time to support colonialist objectives. For example, when the soil of New England began to be depleted by the colonists' intensive farming practices, colonial elites began advising farmers on the pages of their almanacs that the soil was like an account book and when one withdrew minerals from the soil, nature's accounts must be balanced by returning those chemicals to the soil. (Ecological 214-215). Whereas most eighteenth-century farmers had believed that the best fertilizers came from the secretions of an animate Mother Earth--humus, dung, urine, and animal and vegetable matter--early nineteenth-century farmers began to be persuaded by chemists and their spokesmen the almanac-makers that when organic fertilizers were not available, chemically-produced minerals would just as successfully keep fields fertile (Ecological (206-215)).²⁷ As Carolyn Merchant explains in her discussion of the "revolution" in colonial Euro-American consciousness, almanac-makers who now believed the earth to be a machine, no longer urged farmers to cajole "Mother Nature" by participating in natural cycles as almanac-makers had during the period of earliest colonization when most farmers were working only for their own subsistence; instead, nineteenth-century almanac-makers urged farmers to ply the

earth with chemically-produced fertilizers for increased yields and long-term profits. Furthermore, as a patriarchal system of land inheritance put pressure on colonists to put more and more land under cultivation, in turn degrading the region's ecology, and a national market economy offered increased opportunities for profit making, ordinary farmers were drawn to follow the advice found in their almanacs which urged them to adopt agricultural improvement and specialization technologies (Ecological 113-116, 126, 145, 195).

Whereas New England subsistence-farming tribes like the Narragansetts had allowed depleted fields to lie fallow for up to fifty years so that these fields could regenerate naturally and the earliest colonial farmers had used natural fertilizers like dung and seaweed, later colonists seeking to make increased profits approached depleted fields with increasingly pervasive technologies--like chemically-produced fertilizers and pesticides. Merchant points out that Nature's short-term responses to these new agricultural technologies was immediate increases in yield (and profit) for the farmer but the earth's long-term response to these technologies was depletion, degradation, and species extinction in other parts of the New England ecosystem. The earth's short-term response to chemical fertilizers made it increasingly less likely that colonists would practice older, mimetic modes of farming and

more likely that they would be open to the mechanistic, technological modes of farming being touted by colonial elites on the pages of their almanacs (Ecological 87, 109). The irony here is that all during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and early nineteenth centuries when colonists were transforming nature from an animate, responsive mother into an inert, unresponsive commodity, the earth **was** responding to human-induced change and this response played a key role in the "revolution" for Euroamericans from a mimetic consciousness to a mechanistic consciousness.

What would be interesting to Old Yoeme and other keepers who might look at sections of old farmers almanacs which advise colonists to master the earth's processes for profit is that when colonists began to reject their own ancient mimetic traditions, they became increasingly unable to understand that the languages in which the earth responds to long-term overexploitation--depletion, scarcity, extinction--conveyed an ominous message for future generations of human and nonhuman species. Yoeme, who is a twentieth-century witness to the unbelievable long-term damage that chemically-created fertilizers and pesticides can do to the earth, explains to Lecha that nature is a player in the shaping of human consciousness and knowledges because nature is a whole of which humans are only a part and there is always an interchange of energy, materials and information going on

between human and nonhuman species and the natural environment. However, if humans fail to understand the languages of the earth and the messages being conveyed, Yoeme emphasizes, they "might not survive" (A 719). But the earth's energy cannot be lost or destroyed, the "earth would go on, the earth would outlast anything man did to it" (A 718). With a stereotype-defying grasp of the first law of thermodynamics, Old Yoeme is expressing her belief that humans who do not understand the earth's languages might destroy themselves, but the earth's energy will just be changed into other forms and go on (A 719).²⁸

Colonial almanacs, then, reveal how human consciousness about "Nature" has been socially constructed over time or, more specifically for the keepers' purposes, how European consciousness about the nature of the earth has been constructed to support and legitimate colonial objectives. Viewed as a social construction, "Nature" as it was conceptualized by differing groups of people--Native American, peasant farmer, colonial elite--is not some ultimate truth that is gradually discovered through the objective processes of observation, experiment, and mathematics. Rather, as historian of science Elizabeth Bird explains, it is a relative changing structure of different human representations of "reality" and depends "on one's position in the field of negotiation" (Bird 258, Ecological 23). The debate over the

nature of the earth found in colonial almanacs demonstrates how symbol systems, metaphors, and images which express a culture's worldview can be manipulated by the elites in society to claim the power to represent "reality" and that "When one worldview is challenged and replaced by another, . . . power over society, nature, and space are at stake (Ecological 22).

By creating "keepers of the almanac" who appropriate early colonial almanacs into their own almanac, Leslie Silko's novel embraces the debate and dialogue which are key characteristics of the colonial almanac and challenges those who claim the epistemic privilege and authority to represent "reality" from only one perspective. Indeed, early American almanacs literally embody a challenge to the one voice which authoritatively claims the power to represent "reality" for all. As Silko notes, almanacs are "designed so that you don't have control when you confront [them]" ("Poetics" 43); they are, in a sense, reproduction out of control. Colonial American almanacs, for example, were written for the masses and outsold that most authoritative of texts--the Bible (Butler 328). They were compiled by colonial elites but authors of both genders and different races participated in their production and the contents were dictated more by the common people who bought them than those who produced them.²⁹

The local knowledges which matter to local people were taken

seriously and multiple, often contrary, views were expressed on their pages. And readers felt free to "get into the conversation" in the margins or blank spaces of the text. (One can easily imagine Yoeme expressing vulgar humor in the margins of an essay explaining Descartes's notion of a mechanistic universe.) So, while authoritative texts desire to maintain hegemony over representational space, almanacs challenge the very notion of authoritative discourse.

By incorporating sections of early American almanacs which are characterized by an ongoing debate over the nature of the earth, Silko's keepers claim the right to "get into the conversation" about "Nature."³⁰ They take what Merchant has called "an ecological approach to history" which "reasserts the idea of nature as historical actor" and "challenges the mechanistic tradition by focusing on the interchange of energy, materials, and information among living and nonliving things in the natural environment" (Ecological 7). The keepers recognize that the earth's response to colonial people, pathogens, animals, crops, and technologies demonstrates that nature is not passive, but "an active complex that participates in change over time and responds to human induced change" (Ecological 8). As the Apache elders of one of the narratives included in Yoeme's almanac assert, one of the most dangerous qualities of Europeans is that they suffer "a sort of blindness to the world. To them, a 'rock'

was just a 'rock' wherever they found it, despite obvious differences in shape, density, color, or the position of the rock relative to all things surrounding it" (A 224). In other words, Europeans refuse to acknowledge the role that rocks and other nonhuman complexes play in the ecology of a region; everything that is not European and human is reduced to a simple resource to be utilized in whatever way Europeans deem necessary for "progress."

Because they have incorporated colonial almanacs into their own almanac, the keepers understand that this reduction or "blindness" to the world, this refusal to "hear" the earth's responses to domination has been driven by greed and deliberately constructed over time in the colonizing effort to claim power over society, nature and space by claiming the authority to represent "reality." But like Donna Haraway, the keepers seem to be arguing that "the world has always been in the middle of things, in unruly and practical conversation" ("Monsters" 304) and that we must strive not for better ways to represent nature, but for better ways to "get into a conversation" with a "nature" that is already and always articulating itself. Haraway adds that "in obsolete English, to articulate meant to make terms of agreement," and that to articulate is to "signify. It is to put things together, scary things, contingent things" ("Monsters" 324). In framing her novel as that most unruly of genres--the almanac, Leslie Silko

has brilliantly created a place in which to theorize about how we might make terms with the world that we live in and about how we might come to live in an articulate world.

III

Silko's use of the almanac as a narrative frame allows her to theorize, to speculate about past, present, and future, and to provide the "roughest sketch for travel"--as Donna Haraway has said about her own theories--to "an imagined elsewhere that we may yet learn to see and build here" ("Monsters" 295). Haraway often speaks of the urgency of writing theory. It is in theory, she writes, that we "contest for meanings" which might move us elsewhere; it is in theory that we might find "another relationship to nature besides reification and possession" ("Monsters" 296). Although novels are not often considered "theory,"³¹ there are important points of intersection between Silko's "theories" in Almanac of the Dead and Haraway's theories about how we might travel to an "imagined elsewhere." In one of the numerous narratives added to Yoeme's continuously growing almanac, Wilson Weasel Tail, a Lakota Souix who has dropped out of his third year at UCLA Law School to devote himself to poetry, theorizes about how people of all races and cultures can join allegiance with revolutionary insurgent peoples to work for a relationship to nature which does not dominate and is not possessive.³² Weasel Tail travels to Tucson, Arizona, to speak to German

root doctors, Celtic leech handlers, new-age Anglo-American spiritualists, ecologists, ecowarriors, Hopi and Yupik medicine men and women, and Mayan revolutionaries who have convened at the International Holistic Healer's Convention. In his speech to this diverse group of peoples, Weasel Tail blasts all those who have "committed outrages against the forests and the mountains" (A 723). However, Weasel Tail does not align himself with the "new-age spiritualists" or environmentalists at the convention who argue from their snug corners of middle-class, Anglo-American affluence for pristine wilderness areas, walled-off reserves, or undisturbed rainforests (A 716). He is too much aware that from the eastern shores of North America to the deepest reaches of the Amazonian rainforest, the diversity and patterns of many nonhuman species cannot be explained without taking into account the long-term practices of indigenous peoples. He knows that certain tree species, for example, evolved over centuries in response to fires which were deliberately set by indigenous peoples to encourage the growth of pasture grass and create forest openings that would attract wildlife.³³ In other words, it was only after indigenous populations had been sickened, enslaved, killed, and otherwise displaced from their communities, fields, and lands, that Europeans were able to represent the Americas as "empty" of culture, as "untouched nature," or, in later terms, as a purely "biological" entity.

Weasel Tail recognizes that representations of pure, uninhabited "Nature," like all representations, as Edward Said's discussion in Orientalism has made us aware, "operate for a purpose, according to a tendency, in a specific historical, intellectual, and even economic setting" (273). The debate over "Nature" in early American almanacs is just one example of how representations can be manipulated to support colonialist objectives. Weasel Tail clearly understands this; he understands that colonialism and the logic of domination which gives rise to it are dependent on what Donna Haraway calls a "politics of representation" which regularly reduces the represented--whether nature, indigenous peoples, or women--"to the permanent status of the recipient of action, never to be a co-actor in an articulated practice among unlike but joined, social partners" ("Monsters" 312). By incorporating into his poetry/speech the stunning fact that "Computer projections" of the New World's population in 1492 "place the populations of the Americas at more than seventy million" but "one hundred years later, only ten million people had survived" (A 723),³⁴ Weasel Tail exposes how representations of "uninhabited Nature" have operated to mask the incredible violence and loss of human life unleashed by European practices and pathogens. Moreover, Weasel Tail's speech contests the way in which representations of pure

"Nature" reduce a complex human/nonhuman entity to mere resource for European action and work to justify European occupation of depopulated indigenous lands.

By reminding his audience that the Americas were not and did not become "empty," Weasel Tail counters European notions of a nature/culture split and argues for a "nature" which is an irreducible human/nonhuman complex. He emphatically argues that although indigenous tribal peoples have suffered the most devastating mortality in the history of the human race and they have been represented as if "there is no hope for [them] to prevail," the colonizers "forget the inestimable power of the earth and all the forces of the universe" (A 723). Human beings are part of nature and Weasel Tail asserts that people are among the "inestimable forces" of the universe (A 712, 723). Just as certain "natural forces" of the earth respond to over-exploitation of the land with depletion, erosion, drought, and famine, indigenous American peoples are part of the "natural forces" which have continuously responded to and resisted the violence and oppression of European "natural forces" since 1492.³⁵

Like Silko's character Weasel Tail, Donna Haraway argues for a "nature" in which the human, nonhuman, and organic are "forces" or, as she puts it, "actors" which have 'effects in the world.' She writes:

Actors are entities which do things, have effects, build

worlds in concatenation with other unlike actors. Some actors, for example specific human ones, can try to reduce other actors to resources--to mere ground and matrix for their actions; but such a move is contestable, not the necessary relation of 'human nature' to the rest of the world. ("Monsters" 311)

Weasel Tail's theory, or as he calls it, "poetry," contests the reduction of American lands to mere resource and argues that indigenous peoples have always been "actors" who have resisted colonial practices which reduced and represented them as passive recipients of action. Drawing an analogy between the ongoing active resistance of indigenous peoples throughout the Americas and the Ghost Dance religion which swept through American Indian tribes in the late 1880s and 1890,³⁶ Weasel Tail explains to his audience that

The truth is the Ghost Dance did not end with the murder of Big Foot and one hundred and forty-four Ghost Dance worshipers at Wounded Knee. . . . Throughout the Americas, from Chile to Canada, the people have never stopped dancing; as the living dance, they are joined again with all our ancestors before them, who cry out, who demand justice, and who call the people to take back the Americas!" (A 724).

In this passage, Weasel Tail, like Haraway, is theorizing that domination is not the "necessary relation of 'human nature' to

the rest of the world." By calling his audience's attention to the ongoing "dance" of resistance to colonial oppression, Weasel Tail's poetic speech, like Donna Haraway's theories, works to ensure that the "powers of domination do fail sometimes in their projects to pin other actors down" and encourages culturally and racially diverse groups of actors to work together to "enhance relevant failure rates" ("Monsters" 311).

Because Wilson Weasel Tail's speech encourages those who are concerned with ecology to see how a logic of domination undergirded by a politics of representation is the link between the interconnected oppressions of nature and indigenous peoples, Leslie Silko's work must be recognized as theory in the same sense as Haraway's work is recognized as theory. Like the theories of ecofeminists and feminist historians of science, Wilson Weasel Tail's poetry/theory contests all forms of oppression and works to "set the people free" (A 713). In this "imagined elsewhere," "Nature" would not be represented as some purely biological entity but as a "social nature" which at every turn is "co-inhabited and co-constituted by humans, land, and other organisms" ("Monsters" 309). Weasel Tail has come to the convention, then, to profess poetry/theory which might move others who are interested in working with indigenous peoples not to "save the Garden of Eden" but for a different, nonreductive organization

of land and people.

IV

Introducing one of his poems, Wilson Weasel Tail explains that he left law school because the laws of colonizing governments have most often been used to "[crush] and [cheat] the poor" (A 714). In the poem, he chants the names of several legal cases in which the U.S. government broke its treaties with American Indian tribes and/or sued Native American peoples for land granted to them in those treaties. "Winters v. United States! / Williams v. Lee! / Lonewolf v. Hitchcock! / Pyramid Lake Paiute Tribe v. Morton!" (A 715). The laws and courts of states and countries, Weasel Tail's poetry emphasizes, obviously have not protected "the sixty million dead souls" who "howl for justice in the Americas" (A 723). For this reason, Weasel Tail decides to devote himself to his poetry because he believes that the fight for land is inextricably connected to the fight for justice and that one of the most effective tools in this fight "is the power of poetry" (A 714). Among those listening to Weasel Tail's speech is Angelita, a Mayan revolutionary who has pledged to protect the twin Mayan leaders of an indigenous army which is marching north to peacefully retake colonized tribal lands. As a twentieth-century descendent of the ancient Mayan peoples who once built massive pyramids all over Central America but who now are some of the most desperately poor people in

Mexico, Angelita understands how a politics of representation has been used to oppress her land and people. But because Angelita's ancestors developed an incredibly complex writing system and created beautifully painted hieroglyphic books which still have an influence in Mayan culture today, Angelita also understands what Weasel Tail means when he talks about how "poetry" can energize a people's resistance against the powers of domination.

In the history of the Americas, certain actors have claimed the right to represent "reality" from only their own perspective, but Silko is much more interested in how other actors resist those representations, fight for the land, and work for justice. By creating Angelita and the twin heroes as Mayans, Silko invokes the history of those people she talked about in the January 6, 1994 Tucson news report on Almanac of the Dead and the Chiapas uprising. The Mayan people, she said, have always exhibited a "strong fighting spirit" and have never been willing to "give up their lands or culture." Rooting Yoeme's almanac in Mayan history afforded Silko great latitude, she told Laura Coltelli, to write about "history, and story, and who makes the story" (151). For years before and during the writing of Almanac of the Dead, Silko had studied the Maya, whose ancient civilization flourished between 300 and 900 A.D. and her study led her to root her novel in the history of what happened to the Mayans and their

great libraries of books **after** the colonization of the Americas because this is a story which so richly illustrates Silko's theories about how "poetry" can be utilized to dismantle the logic of domination and promote a justice that encompasses both land and people (Coltelli 151).

The fragmented parchments covered with strange hieroglyphic markings that Lecha discovers among Old Yoeme's dilapidated notebooks, yellowed papers, newspaper clippings, and sections of old farmer's almanacs, then, are modeled on the only four Mayan "almanacs" to survive the bonfires of ardent Spanish missionaries who followed in the wake of the Spanish conquistadors (151).³⁷ Mayan priests had once used the information in these brightly painted paper books--or codices--as mnemonics to teach Mayan children about mathematics, history, royal lineages, rituals, prayers, and hymns. Like the later colonial American almanacs which included astrologically calculated ephemeris, Mayan books included "almanacs" which were astrologically calculated for specific locales because Mayan people, like the later European colonists, believed that the literal place one inhabited influenced human events. Mayan almanacs detailed the astonishingly accurate Mayan 260-day calendar and gave the astrological information necessary for priests to calculate the most auspicious days for religious and planting ceremonies. By looking into these almanacs, Silko explains to

Laura Coltelli, priests were able to move beyond the present and prophesy "about famine and death, revolution and conquest" (151). Framing her novel--which was published nearly 500 years after Columbus first landed in the Americas--as an almanac, then, roots Almanac of the Dead in an ancient, Pre-Columbian genre and, in a sense, "bookends" the 500 year period of conquest, revolution, and resistance which Silko is analyzing.³⁸

From the very beginning of the colonial period, Silko notes, European peoples have claimed the right to "tell the story," to speak for indigenous peoples (Coltelli 151). Spanish friars understood that if they were ever to conquer the lands and peoples of the Americas they would need to disengage the Maya from their surrounding and constituting discursive "locales"--their history, religion, sciences, literature--so that the Maya might be relocated within the history of Spain and put under Spanish spiritual and political authority. As Donna Haraway writes, colonization and the logic of domination upon which it is built are dependent "on distancing operations. The represented must be disengaged from surrounding and constituting discursive and non-discursive nexuses and relocated in the authorial domain of the representative" ("Monsters" 312). So, one of the first acts of the missionaries was to raze the great Mayan libraries and make bonfires of the thousands of brightly inked

hieroglyphic books. Diego de Landa, a Franciscan priest notorious for torture of the Yucatec Maya and for book burning, noted how much the Maya mourned the loss of their sacred almanacs. Landa writes:

These people . . . used certain characters or letters with which they wrote in their books about their ancient things and sciences We found a great number of books in these letters of theirs, and because they contained nothing but superstition and the devil's falsehoods, we burned them all, which upset [the Mayas] most grievously and caused them great pain.³⁹

Here, Landa distances himself from the obvious pain he is causing the Maya and justifies Spanish violence by reducing and representing Mayan culture as "superstition and the devil's falsehoods." In this way, Landa authorizes himself as the representative of those too "superstitious" to speak for themselves. The aim of Landa's "distancing operation" is to disempower all those who get discursively constituted as beings with opposing interests and to reduce those beings to the permanent status of passive, recipients of action.

But the Maya were never merely passive recipients of action. Silko tells Coltelli that when the books which had served the Maya as mnemonics were gone, and the Spanish were committing genocide on an unimaginable scale, Mayan elders realized that they could not maintain their traditions orally

for very much longer (152). But the Maya were an ancient people whose history encompassed over three thousand years. They had faced challenges to the survival of their culture before and they viewed the Spanish conquest in light of the innumerable military invasions, social upheavals, and ecological crises which they had already suffered and survived. During the 600 year "Classic Period" in which their civilization reached its peak, the Mayans, as they had for many centuries before, built massive pyramids and dotted their cities with stone monuments inscribed with the hieroglyphic "almanacs" which detailed their calendars, gods, religious ceremonies, places, and royal genealogies. Hieroglyphic texts in great quantity were also painted on pottery and door lintels, and inked on long strips of paper that were folded like screens to make books.⁴⁰

But around 900 A.D., Mayan civilization mysteriously collapsed. There is still considerable debate about what happened to the Maya and about why their cities were suddenly and rapidly depopulated. However, a series of dramatic archeological and anthropological breakthroughs over the last thirty years has led Mayanists to an emerging consensus about factors which may have contributed to the collapse. University of Arizona archeologist T. Patrick Culbert has discovered evidence of overpopulation and an accompanying overexploitation of the rain-forest ecosystem on which the

Maya depended for food. Culbert adds that there is evidence this ecological crisis led to water shortages, a disintegrating agricultural system, and malnutrition (Lemonick 48). The most startling new information, learned when scholars began deciphering the Mayan writing system is that the Mayans were not the peaceful people scholars once assumed they were. Indeed, the Maya were a militaristic people and warfare played a key role in their civilization (Coe 65, 270). Before 761 A.D., Arthur Demarest, the leading archeologist of Mayan civilization explains, the rulers of competing Mayan city-states conducted very well-orchestrated battles to seize dynastic power and procure royal captives for very public and ornate executions. But after 761, Demarest adds, "wars led to wholesale destruction of property and people, reflecting a breakdown of social order comparable to modern Somalia."⁴¹ By the end of the Classic Period, ferocious competition, fueled by a ruling elite grown large enough to produce intense rivalries, may have exploded into a civil war which triggered full-fledged, vicious wars and turned once proud cities into ghost towns (Lemonick 47).

What interests Silko about this period of extreme crisis in Mayan civilization is that despite a deepening vortex of overpopulation, environmental degradation, malnutrition, tribal warfare, and rapid depopulation of cities, the Mayans continued to record their history and compile their almanacs.

After the Classic Period, they no longer inscribed their histories on monuments and buildings, but as anthropologist Dennis Tedlock notes, "scribes went right on making books for another six centuries."⁴² In other words, the survival of Mayan literature was not dependent on outward forms. During and after the crisis at the end of the Classic Period, what seems to have been important to the Mayans was not so much the medium--stone or paper--in which their almanacs were recorded, but simply that they would continue to be recorded. Mayan priests tenaciously refused to let crisis deprive them of the books they so highly valued, and this tenaciousness served them well in the sixteenth century when Europeans arrived in Mesoamerica. Once again, the Maya refused to let their ancient knowledges and culture disappear. So while the story of conquest, re-presented from a European perspective, ends in smoke and flame, the much more interesting and important story for Silko is the story of how Mayan people and culture survive and continue after conquest. This is why, Silko tells Coltelli, she patterned the "history" of Old Yoeme's almanac on the history of the Mayan almanacs.

After "conquest," Silko explains, Spanish friars determined that if they were ever to bring indigenous peoples into the Catholic church, Spanish priests would have to learn something about the languages and cultures of the native peoples they were trying to convert. For this reason, Spanish

priests worked out the problems of adapting their own alphabet to the sounds of native languages. Very little time passed, Silko adds, before it dawned on native elders that the alphabets acquired from the missionaries--the burners of ancient books--could be used for political and religious applications other than those of Rome (Coltelli 152, "Word" 27-28). Mayan elders instructed the indigenous boys who were being taught Latin, classical Spanish, and how to write the Mayan language phonetically, to use their new skills as tools to clandestinely record and preserve their own ancient stories and systems of knowledge (Coltelli 152).

The result, notes anthropologist Dennis Tedlock, is that independent Mayan writers translated as much as they could remember of their ancient creation stories, religion, and calendar into alphabetic prose and recorded them in parchment books. Like the Mayan priests who were no longer able to records their almanacs on stone monuments after the Classic Period but who kept right on making books for another six centuries, these Mayan writers placed more importance on the survival of their culture and beliefs than on the outward forms in which they would be written. They left a literary legacy that is both more extensive than the surviving hieroglyphic codices and more open to modern understanding because the books were often recorded in both alphabetic Mayan **and** classical Spanish. The most notable of these works

includes the Popol Vuh of Guatemala and the eighteen surviving Books of the Chilam Balam which were written by a class of priests called the Chilam Balam or "Jaguar Priest."

The Popol Vuh, translated into English by ethnologist Dennis Tedlock as The Mayan Book of the Dawn of Life and the Glories of Gods and Kings, was authored in the mid-sixteenth century by members of three royal Quiche Mayan families. The writers tell the Quiche Maya creation story from the "dawn of life" to the Spanish conquest and pay particular attention to the two sets of heroic twin gods whose "adventures make the sky-earth a safer place for human habitation" ("Introduction" 35).⁴³ More than any other Mayan book, Tedlock explains, the Popol Vuh is important because it "tells us something about the conceptual place of books in the pre-Columbian world" ("Introduction" 31). The writers of the Popol Vuh describe their books, according to Tedlock's translation, as "seeing instruments" or a "place to see" (71). Like the people of many later cultures who would use their almanacs to bring themselves into a more harmonious relationship with the cosmos, and like Silko's fictional "keepers" who use their almanac to "foresee the months and days and years to come" (A 137), the Mayans used their books, Tedlock explains, as "a complex navigation system for those who wished to see and move beyond the present" ("Introduction" 32).

Unlike the Popol Vuh whose form and content was

formalized and set within decades after conquest, the Books of the Chilam Balam were written in the Mayan language using Spanish letters and can be described as "living books." They were continuously copied, recopied, and expanded from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth. According to Ronald Wright, every "Yucatec town of any size possessed one: they were part Bible, part community charter, part almanac, part chronicle" (165). Most importantly, because these books intersperse ancient wisdom and traditions with ideas obviously Biblical and Christian in origin, they reflect what Wright has called "syncretic resistance" to the European colonization of Mexico. An example of "syncretic resistance," Wright explains, can be seen in the way both the Mayan and Aztec peoples learned to use Christian saints as masks for ancient gods. The Aztec goddess, Coatlicue, also called Tonantzin, was recognized before conquest as Our Mother, the wife of Our Father, or the great plumed serpent Quetzalcoatl; together, they formed the heavenly pair, the Duality, Ometeotl.

But after conquest, when the Aztecs were no longer allowed to worship their own gods, Coatlicue became associated with the Virgin Mary, and was worshiped in much of Mexico as Our Lady of Guadalupe (Wright 151). This is just one of many examples of how new beliefs and old grew together in colonial Mexico, Wright argues. Syncretic resistance allowed Mesoamericans to mask and encode the values of their ancient

culture within the symbol systems of the dominant culture. So while the Spanish thought they had conquered the people of Mexico, the Mesoamericans never ceased to resist colonialist domination and to seek new ways to survive and continue as a people and a culture (Wright 150). Put in Haraway's terms, Spanish colonial domination worked to reduce Mesoamericans to the "permanent status of recipient of action" but by learning to use the Roman alphabet to create books like the Popol Vuh and The Books of the Chilam Balam which record and/or mask ancient texts and create new texts, Mesoamerican peoples were actively working to "enhance the relevant failure rates of the powers of domination" and insisting that the Spanish did not have the right to speak for the Mayans or to represent the world as a single reality.

Silko patterns the "history" of Old Yoeme's almanac, then, on the history of books like the Popol Vuh which transform ancient stories into new languages and "living books" like the Books of the Chilam Balam which continuously chronicle the history of a community of people. Old Yoeme tells Lecha and Zeta that "the elders" instructed those skilled in the colonizer's languages to write down their ancient stories and systems of knowledge on primitive horse-gut parchment. These parchments were guarded and continuously expanded until the late 1800s, when Mexican colonialist dictators and land owners began forcing indigenous peoples to

work their large plantations. Many indigenous peoples sickened or died of disease while others were being literally worked to death. So, after much debate over whether or not the almanac should be allowed to fade from existence along with the people, the elders of the tribe decide that an effort should be made to save the almanac or "'book' of all the days" which contains their creation stories, astrological data, calendar systems, meteorological predications, religious ceremonies, planting rituals, historical chronicles, and predictions for the future (A 575). The elders decide that if "even part of their almanac survives they as a people would return" (A 246).

The elders select four children to escape to the north with the sacred almanac. Silko's fictional account of the children's flight north alludes to the actual historical contact between the Mayans of the Yucatan peninsula and the Yaquis of Sonora, Mexico. The Yaqui tribe came into contact with the Mayans when the Yaquis were deported en masse from Sonora to the Yucatan peninsula and enslaved in chain gangs on large estates and plantations by one of the Mexico's cruelest dictators, Porfirio Diaz. Diaz came to power in 1876 and was later deposed in the Mexican Revolution. Silko implies that the escaping children are Mayans who are seeking members of their own tribe who might be living among the remnants of the Yaqui tribe who still inhabit "the high, arid mountains" of

Sonora, Mexico (A 246). This is how members of the Yaqui tribe--like Old Yoeme, Lecha, and Zeta--might have come into possession of ancient fragments of a "Mayan almanac."⁴⁴

The children are told to follow trade routes to the north and seek possible survivors of their tribe. Though parts of the "book of days" are lost during their desperate flight from those who would enslave them, many of the missing stories are remembered and passed down by word of mouth to Old Yoeme and other "keepers of the almanac" who write them down in their own imperfect Spanish and add them to the other classical Spanish translations of ancient texts already a part of their almanac. Yoeme and other keepers also feel free to add their own personal histories, newspaper articles, sections of old colonial American farmer's almanacs, and whatever else that they decide might be useful to the people in their fight to save their land and culture. Sometime later, because of deterioration and wear, Old Yoeme and many other "old ones" must transcribe as much of the sacred almanac as they can into new notebooks to keep the stories from being lost. It is these notebooks, which have themselves become ragged and worn from decades of use, which Old Yoeme delivers into Lecha's and Zeta's hands.⁴⁵

As if she herself were a "keeper of the almanac," Silko gives readers a sense of the fragmented, ragtag state of Old Yoeme's "book of days" by weaving narratives about her

numerous characters, lists of Indian uprisings and massacres, and newspaper-like accounts of corrupt Mexican politicians, unscrupulous American mobsters, and sleazy drugrunners around a cryptic collection of incomplete, scripture-like "fragments." Lecha notes that these strange passages are translations of the few, remaining passages of the ancient "Mayan" parchments. These fragments, with the ancient red and black painted "Mayan" glyphs still clear, are sandwiched between phonetic Mayan transcriptions translated into an often misspelled Spanish (A 569, 134). It is Lecha's and Zeta's job to translate the Spanish into English and then type the translations into a computer so that they can be used to "foresee the months and years to come" (A 137). Some of Lecha's English translations of the fragments look like this:

Ik is three. Ik is wind on the edge of the rain storm;
deity of the rain carries pollen; Lord of the night of
the hollow drum, God of caves and conch shells.
Earthquake is a scale off the back of earth monster
Crocodile. (A 572)

Kan is four. Kan is lizard from whose belly sprang all
the seeds for grain and fruit. (A 572).

Lecha's "translations" of the ancient glyphs follow one another on the page and words like "Ik" and "Kan"--the names for two of the days of the ancient Mayan 260-day calendar--

associate them with the fragmented Mayan codices now housed in Dresden, Paris, and Madrid.⁴⁶ But Silko does not provide the reader with any other clues to the meaning of either passage or any hints as to how they may fit together. By not explaining the meaning of the fragments, Silko starkly reminds her readers that European colonization of the Americas violently fragmented ancient, Pre-Columbian cultures and that many parts of those cultures have been forgotten or irretrievably lost to fire and treachery.

Clearly, the "fragments" around which Silko weaves the narratives of her Almanac symbolize the violence and loss that have occurred everyday in the Americas since European colonization began over 500 years ago. But Silko's purpose in associating her Almanac with texts like the Mayan codices, the Popol Vuh, and the Books of the Chilam Balam is not to accurately portray ancient Mayan historical, cultural, religious, or astronomical knowledge. Silko is not interested in any romantic notions about recovering an "authentic" or "pure" Mayan culture which has been brought to the brink of extinction. Nor is Silko's purpose to tell only of violence and loss. Rather, she wishes to explore the ways in which Mayan culture has survived seemingly insurmountable crises and moved forward. By creating a "book of days" which alludes not only to ancient Mayan texts but also to texts which the Mayans have created since conquest and to those which they continue

to create, Silko is afforded a means of exploring how the ancient knowledges of indigenous peoples--though suppressed and fragmented by colonizing peoples--continue to energize the ongoing indigenous fight for land and culture.

Certainly, Silko's creation of a Mayan character like Angelita who speaks English and Spanish and who knows how to get "direct and humanitarian aid" for the Indians from "foreign governments and multinational corporations" (A 471) indicates that Silko is aware of recently written Mayan books like I, Rigoberta Menchu (1983) which are rooted in the ancient hieroglyphic texts that continue to energize the contemporary fight of indigenous peoples against colonialist oppression. A descendent of the same ancient Quiche Mayan people who learned to write phonetic Mayan and Spanish so that they could transform their ancient codices into books like the Popol Vuh, Rigoberta Menchu learned Spanish when she was twenty years old so that she could "overcome the discrimination" against the Maya in her own country and bring her story to the world community's attention (Qtd. in Wright 272). Menchu's autobiography tells of Quiche Mayan life in the Guatemalan highlands and of how Quiche customs and beliefs are still very much shaped by the words of their ancestors which have been preserved through oral traditions and written texts like the Popol Vuh. Menchu's story illustrates how the continued practice of ancient marriage and planting customs

and the continued adherence to the ancient 260 day calendar is a powerful form of resistance to colonial domination and a part of the fight for the land that will continue unabated "because we are the ancient owners of this continent" (Qtd. in Wright 272).⁴⁷ By heading many of her chapters with epigraphs from the Popol Vuh which correspond to her descriptions of Quiche customs, Menchu makes clear how the struggle of the ancient writers of the Popol Vuh to record their most sacred stories and beliefs has helped to energize the contemporary struggle of the Quiche Mayan people to resist those forces in Guatemala which have sought to disengage the Maya from their surrounding discursive and nondiscursive environments and thereby extinguish their voice and culture.

Menchu resists the reduction of her people to mere recipients of action by putting the Quiche people back into their complex discursive and nondiscursive environments but she refuses to perform the role of passive conduit of ancient traditions for her non-Quiche reading audience. To her description of traditional Quiche customs, she unflinchingly adds the story of the domination of the Indians, who make up 60% of Guatemala's population, by the minority Ladinos, who are mostly the descendants of the European colonists.⁴⁸ Her book recounts in horrifying detail how Guatemalan "security forces" tortured and murdered her father and brother and repeatedly raped her mother and left her to die. To battle

this horrendous barbarity, Menchu and her people, like the young Mayan boys who found the languages of the Catholic priests could be used in their battle to survive, began "looking for texts" which they could relate "to our Indian culture" and use in their fight to survive (131). In their ancient oral and written traditions, Menchu's people discovered that the weapons of their ancestors--stones, salt and chili--could be hurled skillfully into their enemy's eyes.

And from the Bible, Menchu's people learn not to "turn the other cheek" but that the stories of Judith, Moses, and David teach resistance to "injustices which are committed against our people" (134). Quiche resistance, then, is syncretic and Menchu explains that when the Quiches accepted the Catholic religion, "we didn't accept a condition, or abandon our culture. It was more like another way of expressing ourselves" (80).

Menchu, who was named the 1992 Nobel Laureate for Peace, is not fighting in the name of an idealized or mythical past; she utilizes any tools--ancient customs, Spanish, and/or the Catholic religion--which will help her effectively express her people's position and help them fight for their survival. Menchu's detailed autobiographical rendering of the violence being committed against the Quiche people and her astute political analysis of the roots of colonial domination helped publicize the genocide being committed in Guatemala. Her

words raised money for the revolution and her influence brought pressure against the Guatemalan and U.S. governments who were covertly involved in the massacres of her people.

Silko may have had Menchu in mind when she created Angelita, who also refuses to be a passive conduit of her people's ancient traditions. The resistance movement of Angelita's people is bolstered by their practice of ancient traditions. But Angelita is all too aware of the daily acts of violence committed against her people and she understands that ancient traditions alone will not protect them from their enemies; so she goes to the Holistic Healer's Convention in Tucson to raise money for her people's fight to retake ancestral lands (A 737). Like the "keepers of the almanac" who utilize sections of the early American colonizers' almanacs in their fight, Angelita practices a form of syncretic resistance by following ancient traditions at the same time she is mastering international politics and fundraising.

Obviously, Silko recognizes, as did the Mayan writers of the Popol Vuh, that survival will necessitate not only a remembering and rewriting of the people's most sacred stories but also an analysis and critique of the culture of the conquerors, and this is precisely where both the ancient Mayan writers and Silko come in for an interestingly similar criticism of their texts. The Popol Vuh, for example, has

been called the most important native language text in all the New World by the anthropologists and Americanists who have studied the text. But they find the opening passage embarrassing because it reflects the fact that it was written after Spanish conquest. The Quiche writers state: "We shall write about this now amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now. We shall bring it out because there is no longer a place to see it, a Council Book" (71). On the last page of the text the royal writers again emphasize that for the Quiche people the Popol Vuh is a "place to see;" and from this "place," everything "they saw was clear to them" (219). Specifically invoking the actual place they are from--Quiche, the writers refuse to merely recount ancient stories and traditions and make all sorts of interpretive comments on European culture, not only in the opening passage when they remind us they are writing in post-Conquest times, but throughout the book, and some of these asides are allusions to what the writers have heard in "the preaching of God" (Word 264).

In the Popol Vuh, the gods make four attempts to create human beings who will be capable of intelligible speech--indeed, the creation of humans who can speak intelligibly to each other and to the gods is the gods' most specific goal. Amidst an ever-widening "conversation" with each other which continually calls others into their deliberations, the gods fail on their first two attempts to create humanbeings. On

their third try, the gods create a single being from mud. As Dennis Tedlock, the translator of the Popol Vuh has noted, this is the gods' only experiment with singularity as all other attempts at creation have proceeded by twos and fours. But the creation of this solitary shape from mud results in the only being in all of the Popol Vuh to utter sounds that cannot even be quoted through onomatopoeia. The mud being is eventually washed away and of all the beings created in the gods' attempts to create humans is the only one fated to have no descendants among the living creatures of the present world (Word 270). Because this passage is judged to be "tainted" by Christianity or possibly even "stolen" from the Bible, anthropologists have characterized the Popol Vuh as everything from a "pious fraud" to an "an accommodation of Indian mythology to Christian notions" to a "syncretic paraphrase of Genesis" (Word 261). Some have even speculated that the Popol Vuh could have been written by a "friar disguised as an Indian" (Word 264).

However, Dennis Tedlock, who speaks the Quiche Mayan language and who has consulted a Quiche Maya elder on how the Popol Vuh should be interpreted, has entertained the possibility that this passage might not just be a paraphrase of the story of Adam, but a "negation of Adam," a comment on the superimposition of Christianity on Quichean peoples," even a criticism of the Bible (Word 270). In other words, it is

possible that in this passage the writers of the Popol Vuh are claiming the right to speak from their own perspective about the culture of the conquerors and to "get into a conversation" with the writers of the Bible about the nature of reality and about who has the right to make claims about reality. Whatever the writers' intentions, this passage makes it clear that "reality" and the "facts about it" are simultaneously constructed through a social negotiation between differing groups of people and that one's positional perspective or place always influences how one constructs "reality."

What is interesting about the passage about the mud being in the Popol Vuh, is that anthropologists (and conquistadors and missionaries, etc.) have often claimed the right to represent, interpret, reduce, speak for, or even dismiss other cultures. But when an indigenous American writer ventures across the horizons of the anthropologists' world, that writer is often labeled as somehow less authentic or perhaps even a "fraud." I believe this is exactly the move which USA Today critic Alan Ryan is making in his review of Almanac of the Dead when he dismisses Silko's latest work because it displays no "special insight into native America." The stories Silko tells, the stories of "Sixty million dead souls [who] howl for justice in the Americas" (A 723) comment upon and critique, as does the mud being of the Popol Vuh, the ways in which a logic of domination and the politics of representation on which it

rests has been used in the last 500 hundred years to represent the world from only one perspective and to justify the destruction of native peoples, cultures, and lands.

Almanac of the Dead, like Silko's first novel, is set predominantly in the Southwestern United States where Silko's people, the Laguna, have lived for centuries. But many of the narratives which Yoeme and Lecha "clip out of the newspaper" and add to the sacred almanac venture far outside the borders the Southwest (A 163, 569). As she did in Ceremony, Silko writes about the connection of Native American people to the land, but the Almanac is also a powerful analysis and critique of the acts of violence which occur everyday in the Americas from Alaska to Columbia. Silko describes her exhaustive array of narratives as her "indictment," her "criminal summons" of the powerful politicians, military men, drugrunners, murderers, mobsters, pimps, pornographers, and real estate developers who have exploited and continue to exploit the peoples and lands for whom they claim the right to speak ("Poetics" 67). Like her character Wilson Weasel Tail, Silko believes that in the history of the Americas, justice has not often been available in the courts ("Poetics" 67); however, a possibility of justice begins with "poetry," with the telling of a story. Just as Menchu's graphic recounting of the violence committed against her family focused the world's attention on the atrocities being committed against the Mayans

in Guatemala and worked to bring 33 years of civil war to an end,⁴⁹ Silko's novel tells stories that focus her readers' attention on how a logic of domination continues to authorize political, cultural, racial, and sexual violence in the Americas. From Alaskan oilmen who drill through the tundra for profit, to Southern plantation owners who violently quell rumored slave uprisings, to Arizona bootleggers who enrich themselves by selling liquor to Apaches, to Mexican child pornographers who make videos of torture and dissection, to Columbian "blue bloods" who rape Indian women because it is their God-given duty to "upgrade" Indian bloodstock (A 541), Silko ranges back and forth through 500 years of history and leaves no rock unturned, no exploitation unexamined. She brings her findings together in a scathingly graphic "indictment" of those who have committed the "rape" of American lands and peoples.

Ryan, however, reduces and represents Silko's extensive narrative "evidence" of crime, to an "unholy mess." He tries to deflect reader attention away from what he labels a "teetering truckload of politically correct themes, from racial oppression to ecology," by attacking Silko personally with the suggestion that she needs "remedial help" because of her "emphatic view of sex as dirty." Then, in an even more problematic move, Ryan questions Silko's "authenticity" as a Native American author because her novel does not explicate

the "Native American mind" (one assumes to the non-native reader) and displays no "special insight into the lives . . . of Native Americans." The implication of Ryan's review is that Real Native American Authors--at least those who are at One with Real Nature--should feel some kind of inherent responsibility to write about Authentic Native American Subjects for the non-native reader and should definitely not comment either on the ways in which Native Americans have been reduced and represented in the history of the Americas or on the ways in which those representations have authorized violence.⁵⁰

Abdul R. JanMohamed explains that one of the ways in which colonialist discourses maintain the privilege of the colonizer and preserve the status quo is by dehistoricizing and desocializing the conquered world, and presenting it as if it were a metaphysical "fact of life." Native peoples are "reduced to the role of passive spectators" before "those who have fashioned the colonial world" and collapsed and "mystified still further as some magical essence of the continent."⁵¹ The ideological function of this mechanism, is to emphasize that "there can be no meeting ground, no identity, between the social, historical colonizers and the metaphysical alterity of the colonized (JanMohamed 68). Colonialist representations of "reality" contain "neither a sense of historical becoming, nor a concrete vision of a

future different from the present" and this "adamant refusal to admit the possibility of syncretism, of a rapprochement between self and Other, is the most important factor distinguishing the . . . colonialist text" (JanMohamed 69, 73).

Ryan's review reduces Native American authors to some magical essence of "Nature" and denies them the possibility of syncretic resistance, of historical becoming, of a vision of the future which is different from the present. Like the "new age" environmentalists that Wilson Weasel Tail avoids because they are working for pristine wilderness areas which ignore the domination, exploitation, and violence that first depopulated the Americas and who deny the possibility of a "social nature" which is co-inhabited by humans and other organisms, Ryan seeks to deny Silko her voice by creating a narrowly-defined, "authentic" Native American writing which excludes Silko's latest novel. But Silko will not be denied her voice. Like the royal writers of the Popol Vuh who write from a place called Quiche for those who wish to see and move beyond the present, she is unapologetic about claiming the right to speak from her own perspective about the culture of the conquerors. She insists on her right to create a place in which to theorize about "what has happened" and to speculate about how we might move to an imagined elsewhere which is different from the violent times in which we live.⁵²

Silko's imagined elsewhere would be like the place that she grew up, a place where there was always a "continual litany . . . of voices," telling stories and "talking about what had happened" ("Poetics" 49). She insists that in its great rush to dominate the people and lands of the Americas for profit, Western culture has "thrown so much by the wayside." But she feels "basically hopeful" that through the power of poetry/stories we can "backtrack" and "try to pick up" some of what's been lost so that we can go forward to a different future ("Poetics" 48, 49). Silko's hope, her imagined elsewhere, is symbolized by the Holistic Healers Convention where differing groups of people of all races and cultures meet to tell each other their stories and work together as "natural forces" for the survival of the earth. They meet on the grounds that a politics of representation must be rejected in favor of a politics of articulation in which humans come together to articulate their multiple positions and give nonhuman nature a voice. They work from the premise that all of the earth's human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic "forces" are always already responding and articulating themselves. Those who would work for the earth's survival would not seek for better ways to represent or speak for "Pristine Nature" or "Authentic Natives" but for better ways of interpreting the litany of voices in an animate world, for better ways of responding to the constant

interchange of energy, materials, and information occurring in the natural environment. Like the gods of the Popol Vuh, they would seek for better ways of getting into an ever widening discussion which continually calls others--both human and nonhuman--into the deliberations.

V

The currently ongoing negotiations between the Zapatista National Liberation Army and the Mexican government which began in March 1994 after the New Year's Day uprising in Chiapas powerfully illustrates why Leslie Silko and Donna Haraway theorize that a politics of articulation is key to the fight for "Nature."⁵³ Chiapas has been the scene of other uprisings such as the fruitless revolts of 1712 and 1868 which were spurred by the seizure of communal lands and the imposition of forced labor and heavy taxes. Chiapas did not play a major part in the Mexican war of independence from Spain of 1810-1821, nor in the revolution that took place a century later. So the people of Chiapas did not benefit from the successes of those revolutions; later, the people of Chiapas benefited little from the land reform and redistribution carried out in the rest of Mexico in the 1930s.⁵⁴ Today, in response to international calls to save precious rainforests, the Mexican government has pledged in an official decree to protect the lands that have been inhabited by the Maya for millennia; nevertheless, the great Lacandon

rainforest has been shorn in the last few decades--for timber, highways, farms, oil drilling, resettlement, even airstrips for drug traffickers--to the bare minimum necessary to keep its ecosystems from collapsing. Homero Aridjis, the president of the Group of 100, a Mexican environmental group, explains that since 1982, the trees of the Lacandon jungle have been cut down at the rate of 3.5 percent a year and that just 30 percent of the original 5,000 square miles remains (A13). And with the disappearance of the forest which once supported them, the Mayan Indians are forced to abandon their villages to seek work in the cities or as wage laborers in the countryside where they live in poverty and are able to practice their cultural traditions only with great difficulty.

Chiapas provides 60 percent of Mexico's hydroelectric energy, but in towns like Ocosingo, Altamirano, and Las Margaritas--the towns where the Zapatistas burst into prominence on New Year's Day--only one-third of the households have electricity (Aridjis A13). And discoveries of petroleum deposits in Chiapas in the 1960s and '70s did little to improve the lot of many of the state's inhabitants. Where oil was found on Indian communal land, the land was expropriated. Profits from the drilling of oil were directed away from Chiapas residents toward the more prosperous center of the country and today 80 percent of the families in Ocosingo,

Altamirano, and Las Margaritas earn less than \$245 a month. Forty-eight percent of the adults are illiterate (Dombey A16, Aridjis A13). So when Subcomandante Marcos, one of the masked leaders of the Chiapas revolt who will not reveal his real identity asks, "what is behind this revolution in Mexico?" and answers that the rebels want their "land back," he is not just talking about the fight to preserve endangered trees and animals (Bardach 73). He is talking about the fight to save the forest which has been the basis of Mayan cultural and economic survival since the first "American" almanacs were carved into stone in Oaxaca--the state which borders Chiapas.⁵⁵

Marcos emphasizes that the fight for the land goes hand in hand with the fight for social justice and this fight begins with the demand of indigenous people that they be given the right to articulate their own positions, to represent themselves from their own perspectives. Six days after the rebellion broke out, the Mexican government issued a bitterly worded report that echoes those assessments of the Popol Vuh which posit that its allusions to Christian culture prove that it could not possibly have been written by Authentic Quiche people. The report begins, "This is not an indigenous or peasant movement but actions by a radical group directed by professionals who are tricking and even forcing the participation of Indians by press-ganging them."⁵⁶ The

report represents indigenous people as if they are only passive recipients of action, unable to speak for themselves or actively work for a future of their own making. But Marcos counters, "The government says that this is not an indigenous uprising, but we think that if thousands of indigenous people rise up in protest, then it is indeed an indigenous uprising" (Bardach 70).

In a savvy act of late twentieth-century political articulation which illustrates that the rebels can speak for themselves, Marcos allowed himself to be interviewed by Ann Louise Bardach for Vanity Fair's July 1994 issue. Bardach describes Marcos as a "Poet Rebel" because his lengthy communiques are leavened with a wit, humor, and poetry which has enthralled Mexicans nearly as much as their soap operas and led to widespread popular support for the rebels among Mexicans of all classes and regions (Bardach 71, 72). In the interview, Marcos explains that for 65 years, the ruling party of Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), has claimed the right to represent the indigenous peoples of Mexico. In 1988, for example, amidst innumerable allegations of election fraud, the PRI claimed an extremely questionable 90 percent of the Chiapas vote (Dombey A16). Since that time, Marcos explains to Bardach, the party claiming to represent Mexico's indigenous peoples has passed two particularly odious pieces of legislation which "broke the camel's back" and

directly led to the Chiapas rebellion. The first was the undermining of an article of the Mexican Constitution, which had kept Indian land in the hands of Indians. The second was the impending passage of the North American Free Trade Agreement or NAFTA, regarded as a disaster by the Indians and non-Indian poor alike. "NAFTA is a death sentence," said Marcos,

'because it sets up this competition according to your level of skill. And what skill level can illiterate people have? And look at this land,' he said with a grimace, referring to the ejidos, collective farms set aside for the poor, traditionally the worst land available, often steep, rocky hillsides. 'How can we compete with the farms in California and Canada?' (Bardach 132)

So, from the Zapatistas' perspective, the fight for the land is the fight for what Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, in a book about the Amazon rainforest, have called an "ecology of justice" (Qtd. in "Monsters" 309). The core matters of an "ecology of justice" are

direct control of indigenous lands by native peoples; agrarian reform joined to an environmental program; economic and technical development; health posts; raised incomes; locally controlled marketing systems; an end to fiscal incentives for cattle ranchers, agribusiness, and

unsustainable logging; an end to debt peonage, and police and legal protection. ("Monsters" 311)

In peace negotiations with the Mexican government, Marcos put everyone on notice that the support of the Zapatistas would not be won by promises, only "by deeds" which lead to an improved quality of life for Mexico's indigenous inhabitants (Bardach 135). Under the spotlight of international media attention, the rebels have demanded and the government has begun to proceed with the social and economic reforms which they promised the rebels would be put into place.⁵⁷ But Marcos and his supporters are well aware that an "ecology of justice" can never be achieved unless indigenous peoples are given a voice in government. He reminded negotiators that the rebels' most important demand is for election reforms. "We are not begging for democracy. We are demanding democracy" (Bardach 135). He warned Mexican President Carlos Salinas de Gortari that if the PRI resorts to fraud in the August 21, 1994 national elections, "civil war will be the immediate consequence for the country."⁵⁸

Like the Mexican Poet Rebel and the Zapatista Army which they "predict," Silko's characters Wilson Weasel Tail, Angelita, and the twin Mayan revolutionaries, illustrate that the position of indigenous peoples as "defenders of the earth" derives not from a sense of "nature under threat" but rather from a relationship with the earth as the integument in their

own elemental struggle to survive ("Monsters" 310). Their authority to speak for their people derives "not from the power to represent from a distance, nor from an ontological natural status, but from a constitutive social relationality in which the forest is an integral partner, part of the natural/social embodiment" ("Monsters" 310). These characters insists that any program to save "Nature" must begin with basic human rights: an end to the domination, violence, and murder practiced by those who would seize for profit lands which have been occupied by indigenous peoples for generations. As Donna Haraway so eloquently articulates it, "There will be no nature without justice. Nature and justice, contested discursive objects embodied in the material world, will become extinct or survive together" ("Monsters" 311).

VI

Donna Haraway writes that her "theory's optical features are set to produce not effects of distance, but effects of connection, of embodiment, and of responsibility for an imagined elsewhere that we may yet learn to see and build here" ("Monsters" 295). Leslie Silko also creates her latest novel to produce effects of connection, embodiment, and responsibility. Almanac of the Dead is rooted in a genre which is very much connected to and embodied in literal place since almanacs are astrologically calculated for specific

regions, peoples, cultures, and ecosystems. Silko insists in the pages of the Almanac that it is our responsibility to pay attention to the ongoing conversations occurring in the places we inhabit. If we look into the Almanac to "see ways in which people can live through this . . . time of great, great upheaval" ("Poetics" 22), we will see the ominous portents of death and destruction in our own age that will be the result of a continued refusal to attend to the importance of place. As the Apache elders in Almanac of the Dead point out, one of the most dangerous qualities of modern people is that they have not noticed their own location in relation to others--both human and nonhuman (A 224). Silko roots her novel in the writings of both the ancient Mesoamericans and the early American colonists because the histories of these peoples illustrate what can happen when a logic of domination leads to the refusal to pay attention to the earth's cacophonous human and nonhuman voices.

As Ronald Wright explains in Stolen Continents, the Mayans and Aztecs understood that humans took a toll on the earth and that the earth would respond to human-induced change. So they repaid the earth for the existence they enjoyed at the expense of other life through a form of sacred personal bloodletting by kings and priests and an occasional high stakes ballgame that may have served as a substitute for war.⁵⁹ But scholars speculate that environmental

fluctuations, overpopulation, ever increasing competition for shrinking resources, and a ruling elite grown large enough to produce intense rivalries may have played a role in the dramatic abandonment of cities and the instability and militarism that were characteristic of Mesoamerican cultures (Wright 34). Scholars believe that the ruling class may have tried to prolong the survival of their civilization by feeding the sun with more and more human blood which led to the wholesale immolation of war captives. "Human sacrifice was therefore not the persistence of an old 'savage' practice among civilized people who should have known better," argues Ronald Wright, "but rather a hypertrophy of sinister elements in the culture, which in more gracious times had been kept in check" (34).

Silko's "keeper of the almanac," Old Yoeme, uses far more strident words than Wright's to castigate a powerful Mesoamerican ruling elite for their "ignorance of the prophecies and warnings" in their sacred almanacs and for their violent practices.

Those who worshiped destruction and blood secretly knew one another. Hundreds of years earlier, the people who hated sorcery and bloodshed had fled north to escape the cataclysm prophesied when the 'blood worshipers' of Europe met the 'blood worshipers' of the Americas. Montezuma and Cortes had been meant for one another" (A

570).

Yoeme studies the ancient writings for clues that will help her people survive, but she refuses to romanticize the past. Unflinchingly, she notes that among this ancient people there were those who ignored the responses of the "earth's forces" to overexploitation of both people and land. The will to dominate, then, is the connection between the violent "blood worshipers" of all cultures.

The almanacs of the early colonizers of North America advised farmers to exploit Americans lands for profit by practicing ever and ever more pervasive technologies. As a result of the continuing practice of these kind of technologies (one might even say this hypertrophy of sinister elements in Western culture), modern humanbeings, like the ancient Mesoamericans, are facing an age of intense competition for shrinking resources in a world that has been made unstable and militaristic by the discursive and nondiscursive practices of powerful actors who claim the right to represent and/or appropriate the resources of less powerful peoples, countries, cultures, and ecosystems. By creating a massive Almanac of narratives built around fragments of ancient Mayan almanacs and "stolen" early colonial American almanacs, Leslie Silko creates theory which posits that threats to the earth's environment come not just from the dangers of environmental pollution and depletion, but, in the

words of feminist philosopher Lorraine Code, from "social structures and practices that are systematically unjust, discriminatory, remotely authoritarian, and based on principles of competitiveness, domination, and self-interest which serve a privileged minority" (270-271).

If, like the hero twins in the Popol Vuh and the Yaqui twins Lecha and Zeta, we wish to work to make the sky-earth a safer place for habitation, then we must come together like the diverse groups who meet at the Holistic Healers Convention not to work for national parks or walled-off reserves but to work for an "ecology of justice." We must get into an ever widening conversation in which we take into account the importance of place--our own and other's--because assuredly, Donna Haraway insists, "North Americans, Europeans, and the Japanese, among others, cannot watch from afar as if we were not actors, willing or not, in the life and death struggles" of indigenous peoples and their surrounding environments ("Monsters" 311). By insisting that we take notice of our connection to all human and nonhuman species and our embodiment in our natural environments, and by arguing that we must take seriously our responsibility to learn to converse with all human and nonhuman species, Leslie Silko, like the royal Quiche writers of the Popol Vuh, has given us an important "place from which to see."

NOTES

1. A statement from Tyler's A History of American Literature, Vol. II, which was written in 1881 (120).
2. Quoted in Ronald Wright's Stolen Continents (273).
3. Marcos is one of the leaders of the 1994 New Years Day uprising of Mayan Indian people in Mexico. See Ann Louise Bardach, "Mexico's Poet Rebel," (71). Subsequent references quoted parenthetically in the text.
4. From an interview with Leslie Silko conducted by Laura Coltelli on 26 September 1985 and published in Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak by Laura Coltelli (144). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.
5. NBC. KVOA, Tucson, Arizona.
6. For an account of Emiliano Zapata's life and death, see Ronald Wright, Stolen Continents (248-251). See also Dombey, Daniel. "Chiapas Uprising Surprises a Mexico in Denial: History of Unrest is Overlooked as Part of Government Snubbing." Arizona Daily Star. 9 January 1994. A:1, 16.
7. Silko, Almanac of the Dead (513). Subsequent references to this novel will be cited parenthetically in the text as A.
8. Silko's responses to Murrillo's questions were necessarily brief because of the news program's half-hour format, so I have put them into a context with an earlier, 1985 interview which Silko gave to Laura Coltelli in which she describes her 1981 dream in much more detail. I am quoting here from page 152 of Coltelli's interview with Silko published in Winged Words: American Indian Writers Speak, edited by Laura Coltelli.
9. The rebels, many of whom later revealed themselves to be Lacandon Maya, are descendants of Mayan peoples who have lived along the Mexico-Guatemala border in the Petan rain forest for three-hundred years. This rain forest is fast disappearing, falling to the market for mahogany. For more on their ongoing history of rebellion against European conquerors which dates back at least to 1697 when they arose against the Spanish and were defeated at Tayasal in what is modern day Guatemala, see Ronald Wright, Stolen Continents: America Through Indian Eyes Since 1492, 173-176.
10. USA Today. 21 January 1992.

11.22 December 1991.

12. Silko made the statement quoted here on 6 April 1992 in a seminar for graduate students conducted by Larry Evers and Ofelia Zepeda at the University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona. This seminar was part of a course arranged by Evers and Zepeda which included both class visits and public readings by twelve Native American writers. Graduate students participating in the seminar transcribed tapes of each writer's class visit and I am quoting here from page 27 of the as yet unpublished and unedited transcription of Silko's visit. I have slightly edited some of Silko's statements (taking out "uhm"s, "ah"s and some repetition) to make her oral statements more textually readable. All deletions are indicated by ellipses. Evers's and Zepeda's course, related public events, readings, and all related transcripts are titled "Politics and Poetics: A Series of Readings by Native American Writers." Subsequent references to the transcript of Silko's seminar visit will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Poetics," with page numbers in the text.

13. Emphasizing that her book must be read as an "almanac," Silko told the "Poetics and Politics" seminar, "You can't make an almanac like you write a novel" ("Poetics" 32).

14. Personal notes made at the "Brown Bag Lunch with Leslie Silko," at the Native American Graduate Student Office, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona, 6 April 1992.

15. Six Buddhist monks from Thailand, two young men who studied at the monastery, and an elderly nun were murdered execution-style by two high school military enthusiasts from Tucson, Arizona, on August 9, 1991. After hearing false stories about boundless riches inside the monastery from a brother who had been an initiate, Jonathon Doody and Alessandro Garcia had driven to Phoenix, Arizona to burglarize the monastery. The international Buddhist community was outraged and the Thai ambassador demanded justice. The teens were not apprehended until October 1991. See "Teen, 19, Receives 264 years for Killings at Buddhist Temple," Arizona Daily Star, July 16, 1994 (1B, 2B).

16. In the "Poetics and Politics" seminar, Silko discussed how political programs of the United States, particularly educational programs which emphasize Western European knowledges, keep people from forming more culturally and regionally sensible units (64-66).

17. For brief histories of the almanac see Bernard Capp's English Almanacs, 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press (215-238) and Marion Stowell's Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible (3-12). Subsequent references to these works cited

parenthetically in the text.

18. "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" (295). Subsequent references to this article will be cited parenthetically in the text as "Monsters."

19. The Yaqui people live in the Sonoran desert on both sides of the Arizona, U.S. / Sonora, Mexico border and in Baja California and "Yoeme" means "the people" in the Yaqui language. Therefore, in this chapter, any reference to "Yoeme's almanac" is a reference not to one woman's almanac but to the "people's almanac." See "Yaqui Literature" in The South Corner of Time: hopi navajo papago yaqui tribal literature, Larry Evers, editor.

20. Yoeme's defiance of the Mexican federal army in 1918 associates her with Emiliano Zapata, a revolutionary peasant leader, and the Zapatistas of the Mexican Revolution who fought from 1911 to 1919 for the redistribution of land to the indigenous peoples of Mexico. In 1919, Mexican President Venustiano Carranza had Zapata assassinated but his legacy lives on in the Zapatista National Liberation Army which is active in Chiapas today. See Stolen Continents (248-251).

21. See also Carolyn Merchant's Ecological Revolutions (139). Subsequent references to this text will be cited parenthetically in the text as Ecological and references to Merchant's The Death of Nature as Death.

While all early colonial American almanacs were published for the benefit of farmers, the first almanac with the title The Old Farmer's Almanac was written by Robert B. Thomas and appeared in 1793 to fill the void created by the discontinuance of Benjamin Franklin's Poor Richard's Almanac. The Old Farmer's Almanac has been published annually without interruption since that time. See Will Forpe, "Introduction," The Best of the Old Farmer's Almanac (1).

22. In Ecological Revolutions, Carolyn Merchant explains that even in the late 1700s and early 1800s, Harvard educated elites and men like Thomas Jefferson still believed that the earth was alive and that stones grew in the belly of an animate Earth. In Notes on the State of Virginia, Jefferson writes about the living powers of the earth to regenerate itself after a cave "impregnated" with nitre has been excavated. Jefferson criticizes the excavators for "never trying a second time the earth they have exhausted, to see how far or soon it receives another impregnation" (Jefferson 34). In The Death of Nature, Merchant writes that views such as Jefferson's are rooted in the Renaissance view that "all things were permeated by life, there being no adequate method by which to designate the inanimate from the animate. It was difficult to differentiate

between living and nonliving things, because of the resemblance in structures. Like plants and animals, minerals and gems were filled with small pores, tublets, cavities, and streaks, through which they seemed to nourish themselves" (28).

23. See Jon Butler "Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600-1760" (321). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

24. Stowell writes that almanac publications during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries actually outnumbered all other books combined--religious included (x). Over 62 authors were publishing annual almanacs between 1639 and 1800 in America, including two women and one African American man (111, 155, 321).

25. In the Shadow of Enlightenment, Herbert Leventhal explains that astrology, the oldest of Renaissance 'sciences,' continued to retain considerable vitality well into the eighteenth century and many colonists, including many Harvard-educated elites, believed that the planets had a direct influence on historical events and an indirect influence on the human mind (13-65).

26. Of the forty-four almanacs published in Massachusetts by 1687, forty-one were prepared by Harvard graduates such as Harvard president Charles Chancey's son Nathaniel and Cotton and Nathaniel Mather (Ecological 134-135).

27. In 1840, German chemist Justus Liebig argued that if more minerals were added to the soil than were taken away, farm production would be increased. To achieve this, artificial phosphates could be produced in chemical factories by combining sulfuric acid with bones (Ecological 207).

28. Isaac Asimov explains that the first and second law of thermodynamics can be stated in one sentence: "The total energy content of the universe is constant and the total entropy is continually increasing" (Qtd. in Rifkin 47). What this means is that it is impossible to either create or destroy energy. Specifically the first law says that while energy can never be created or destroyed it can be transformed from one form to another (Rifkin 48).

29. Marion Stowell writes that two women and one African-American man were among the numerous producers of colonial American almanacs (102-111, 155).

30. The phrase "get into the conversation" was suggested to me by Kenneth Burke's famous fable of human history. In The Philosophy of Literary Form, Burke suggests that human history is "an unending

conversation" or a story that participates in the stories of those who have lived, who live now, and who will live in the future (110). Burke notes that people change the course of human history by putting in their "oar." I am suggesting here that Silko's keepers are "getting into the conversation" by putting in their "or" and challenging the right of the colonizers to dominate the conversation from only one perspective.

31. See Chapter Three below, "Why Bears are Good to Think," for a discussion of why this is most often the case.

32. Like Weasel Tail, Silko dropped out of law school to become a writer and poet. Weasel Tail considers his work an "indictment against the United States of America and all other colonials" (A 714). I am arguing that Silko voices her theories through her character Weasel Tail based on her statement that "I'm like Wilson Weasel Tail at the end of . . . Almanac. [Almanac of the Dead] is my indictment. This is my criminal summons" ("Poetics" 67).

33. See Ecological (38) and "Monsters" (309).

34. In Stolen Continents, Ronald Wright cites estimates of the New World's population in 1492 which range from 57-112 million. But by 1600, Wright observes, less than a tenth of the original population remained, most having died from European diseases--smallpox, measles, influenza, bubonic plague, yellow fever, cholera, and malaria. Those who weren't killed by disease had "their world barbarously sacked by Europeans" (4, 14).

35. By describing indigenous American peoples as "natural forces," I do not think Silko is succumbing to an essentialism which, as Linda Alcoff describes in "Cultural Feminism Versus Poststructuralism: The Identity Crisis in Feminist Theory," "forces the individual back on himself and ties him to an identity in a constraining way" (415). Nor do I think Silko is being sucked into what Abdul R. JanMohamed has described in "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," as a colonialist "vortex" which mystifies "natives" as "some magical essence of the continent" (68). In colonialist literature, JanMohamed argues, the ideological function of this vortex is to deny that there can be any meeting ground between "the social, historical creatures of Europe and the metaphysical alterity of the Calibans and Ariels of [the colonized country]" (68).

As the discussion which follows will demonstrate, Silko sees people of all races as "natural forces" who are not passive but active. Indeed, Almanac of the Dead illustrates how the "natural forces" of all races can work to undermine the status quo and open up distinctly syncretic possibilities for historical becoming for

all peoples.

36. In American Indian Literatures, LaVonne Ruoff explains that the Ghost Dance religion was a messianic movement that swept across the Plains after the buffalo had been exterminated and the last of the tribes forced onto reservations. "Its leader was Wovoka, or Jack Wilson (Paiute), who predicted that the Plains would again support millions of buffalo and that whites would disappear. By 1890, his words roused the Plains tribes and frightened whites before it died out. One tragic result was the massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota, in 1890, when Big Foot's band of Sioux Ghost Dancers was slaughtered after a dispute about turning in their weapons. This incident ended the Indian wars" (3-4).

37. These four Mayan "codices" or books, once brightly painted with the hieroglyphic ideograms and phonograms of the Mayan written language but now in various states of dilapidation, are currently housed in museums in Paris, Dresden, Madrid, and Mexico City. Only three, according to noted Mayanist Michael Coe, have texts of any length. However the Dresden Codex, writes Coe in Breaking the Maya Code,

contains 77 almanacs based upon the [Mayan] 260-day calendar, in which specific days are associated with specific gods and appropriate auguries; New Year ceremonies; Venus and eclipse tables; and multiplication tables related to the calendar and the movement of the planets. (265)

Silko's use of the word "Almanac" in the title of her novel, then, is very apt.

38. Basing her Almanac on the Mayans' ancient almanacs reminds Silko's readers that when European conquerors arrived in the "Americas," they found already thriving cultures with highly developed religions, calendar systems, sciences, and economic systems. Silko's fictional almanac also reminds readers that the earliest extent "American almanacs" and "American writing" were not created by Europeans in the seventeenth-century but inscribed on stone monuments by Mayans around 600 B.C. near the modern city of Oaxaca, Mexico and not far from the site of the 1994 Chiapas uprising of Mayan peoples. See Miguel Leon-Portilla, "Men of Maize" (159-160). Subsequent references to this text quoted parenthetically in the text as "Men."

39. Qtd. in Ronald Wright, Stolen Continents (168). For a discussion of Landa's tortures and murders of the Yucatan Maya, see pages 167-171 in Stolen Continents.

40. Dennis Tedlock, "Introduction" to the Popol Vuh (24-25).

41. Qtd. in Lemonick, "Secrets of the Maya" (47).

42. Dennis Tedlock's "Introduction" to the Popul Vuh, (24-27).

43. Between 1701 and 1703, a Spanish friar named Franciso Ximenez happened to get a look at this manuscript, made the only surviving copy of the Quiche text, and added a Spanish translation. Ximenez's manuscript was spirited out of Guatemala to Europe but now is housed in the Newberry Library in Chicago. For more of the history of the Popol Vuh, see Dennis Tedlock's "Introduction" to the Popol Vuh and his chapter "Creation and the Popol Vuh: A Hermeneutical Approach" in The Word and the Work of Interpretation. Quotes from these two sources will hereafter be cited parenthetically in the text as "Introduction" and Word.

44. For a discussion of the Yaqui deportation to the Yucatan peninsula, see Ronald Wright, Stolen Continents (247).

45. Silko makes specific reference to The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel ("Error in translation of the Chumayel manuscript: 11 AHU was the year of the return of fair Quetzalcoatl" [A 572]). So Silko's description of Yoeme's "book of days" is very likely influenced by a "Jaguar Priest" book which was compiled in the Yucatec Maya village of Chumayel located on the Yucatan peninsula. According to G.B. Gordon, the "Jaguar Priest" book of Chumayel was compiled in 1782 by Juan Jose Hoil, a Mayan priest who had learned to use the Spanish alphabet. A copy was made in 1868 by German scholar Hermann Berendt because the paper on which the Chumayel text was originally copied was very much worn, stained by use, and discolored by age. The first leaf was missing, several leaves were torn, the margins were decayed, and small portions had been eaten by insects. See G.B. Gordon's "Introduction" to The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel, The Museum Anthropological Publications, Vol. V. Philadelphia: University Museum, 1913. (5, 9).

46. For an excellent, readable discussion of the Mayan 260-day calendar written for the non-Mayanist, see Clara Sue Kidwell's "Systems of Knowledge," in America in 1492, edited by Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., especially pages 379-387. See also Barbara Tedlock's Time and the Highland Maya (88-104), and Michael D. Coe's Breaking the Maya Code (61-62).

47. Mayan resistance to the Western calendar, despite incredible pressure from church and state to conform, and adherence to the ancient 260 day calendar is a phenomenon which has been well documented by anthropologists such as Barbara Tedlock. In Time and the Highland Maya, Tedlock writes that after the Spanish conquest, much of the Mayan aboriginal calendar system was clandestinely maintained throughout the colonial period. In some areas, calendrical knowledge was apparently maintained on a strictly oral basis while in others, it was maintained with the aid of written

mnenomics. Today, notes Tedlock, this intricate calendar system, or parts of the system, still exist in communities in Oaxaca and Chiapas states in Mexico, as well as throughout the Guatemalan highlands (92).

48.The use of the word "Indian" here follows Menchu's use.

49.On March 29, 1994 Guatemala's government and rebel leaders signed three breakthrough agreements aimed at ending more than three decades of civil war. The accords did not end fighting between leftist rebels of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity and the Guatemalan army, but Guatemalan government spokesman Hector Rosada Ganados called the accords "the beginning of the end." See "Guatemala, Rebels Sign Rights Accords Aimed at Ending 33 Years of Civil War." Arizona Daily Star. Wednesday, March 30, 1994. A4.

50.On a humorous note, Silko told the "Poetics and Politics" seminar that she was "tickled pink" by how "berserk" the USA Today reviewer was driven by his reading of Almanac of the Dead. Responding to Ryan's ad feminim attack, Silko laughingly noted that Ryan is almost certainly not a novelist commenting on another novelist's work but might be a "political scientist from Yale" where, incidentally, "they recruit a lot of those CIA guys." She said the novel was obviously achieving the effect she had hoped for because it was designed to "shake [people] up" (42-43).

51.Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonial Literature," (68). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

52.At a "Brown Bag Lunch with Leslie Silko" which I attended at the Native American Graduate Student Office, on the University of Arizona campus in Tucson, Arizona, April 6, 1992, Silko was questioned about why she writes in the "non-native" language of English. The implication of the question was that Silko's work might be more "authentic" if it were written in a traditional native language. Silko explained that she had been deprived of her traditional language by the U.S. Government's programs to "educate" Native American children. In a comment that might echo comments made by the writers of the Popol Vuh who learned to use their colonizer's languages, Silko said emphatically, "I'll use your English, and I'll use it with more eloquence than you to tell you what has happened!" Quoted from personal notes.

53. In the following section, I claim no expert knowledge of Mexican history or its currently unfolding political events. Rather, like Leslie Silko, who clipped newspaper articles all during the time she was writing her latest novel, her character Old

Yoeme who adds newspaper articles to the almanac, and Leche who "always read her newspapers . . . since she first took up her line of work" (A 163), I have clipped newspaper and magazine articles about current events in Mexico since the Zapatistas burst into international prominence on New Year's Day.

54. See Homero Aridjis, "Chiapas Revolt Rooted in Repressive History," (A13). Also see Daniel Dombey, "Chiapas Uprising Surprises a Mexico in Denial: History of Unrest is Overlooked as Part of Governmental Snubbing" (A16). Subsequent references to these articles quoted parenthetically in the text.

55. See Miguel Leon-Portilla, "Men of Maize," (159-160).

56. See Tim Golden, "Peasant Groups, Church Members Accused of Rebel Aid," Arizona Daily Star, 9 Jan. 1994: A16.

57. See "Chiapas Talks in Jeopardy: Rebels Become Fractious as Feud within Ruling Party Boils Over," (Rpt. from Dallas Morning News), Arizona Daily Star, 19 June 1994: A14. Also, in "Zapatistas Caution Against Election Fraud" which was printed on August 8, 1994, Joel Simon writes that the Mexican government recently awarded a \$600,000 grant to build new houses for farmworkers, loosened the purse strings for social programs to benefit corn farmers, and targeted infrastructure projects for impoverished Indian communities, particularly in Chiapas.

58. See Joel Simon, "Zapatistas Caution Against Election Fraud," Arizona Daily Star. 8 August 1994: A11.

59. See Coe, Breaking the Maya Code, (65-66, 270).

Chapter Four
A Powerful Infidel Heteroglossia: Leslie Silko's
Ecological Literary Criticism

It will come,
the moving power of the voice
the moving power of the earth
the moving power of the People.
That's the place the Indian People talk about.
--Simon Ortiz¹

. . . they tried to glut the hollowness with patriotic wars and with great technology and the wealth it brought. And always they had been fooling themselves, and they knew it.²

--Leslie Silko,
Ceremony

There is a growing recognition that where one speaks from affects the meaning and truth of what one says, and thus that one cannot assume an ability to transcend one's location.

--Linda Alcoff³

Since the 1960s, as threats of nuclear contamination, chemical poisoning, overpopulation, global warming, acid rain, and pollution of both rivers and oceans has become increasingly pervasive, a few literary critics have begun to write about the possibility of the "greening" of literary criticism. One of the first of these critics was Joseph Meeker, who argues in The Comedy of Survival (1974) that if the creation of literature "is an important characteristic of the human species, it should be examined carefully and honestly to discover its influence upon human behavior and the natural environment--to determine what role, if any, it plays in the welfare and survival of mankind [,] . . . other species and . . . the world around us" (3-4). Meeker asks "what would

a literary ecology look like?" and goes on to define it tentatively as "the study of biological themes and relationships which appear in literary works" and the study of how literary art "influences the survival of the human species" (9, 10).

Nearly 20 years after the publication of Meeker's book, in a 1989 Presidential address to the Western Literature Association which is becoming widely cited by those working in the emerging field of "ecocriticism," Glen Love argues in, "Revaluing Nature: Toward an Ecological Criticism," that few literary critics have responded to Meeker's call for an "ecological criticism." Like Meeker, Love cites Leo Marx's study of the pastoral, The Machine in the Garden, as one example of "ecological criticism;" but like Meeker, he fails to acknowledge major works written before the 1970s by such influential literary critics as Norman Foerster, Henry Nash Smith, and Perry Miller, all of whom respond to one of the most important and recurring themes in American literature--how humans should relate to the land. Nor does Love cite Annette Kolodny's influential study of America's literary relationship to the land, the The Lay of the Land, which was creatively motivated, according to Kolodny, by "our current ecological and environmental ills" (ix).⁴ Love's inattention to the obvious precursors of an emerging "ecological criticism" seriously undermines his claim that the field of

English has failed to respond "appropriately to the radical displacements accompanying ecological catastrophe" (202).

Love's point is valid, however, when he argues that non-fiction and fiction which addresses the natural world--such as the works of Willa Cather, Edward Abbey, and Mary Austin--is still commonly assigned by many literary critics and teachers to such obscure categories as "nature writing," "regionalism," or "interdisciplinary studies"--labels which announce its insignificance (203). In their critical interpretations, Love asserts, literary critics tend to "regard ego-consciousness as the supreme evidence of literary and critical achievement" and writings which are "eco-conscious" are often "passed over because they do not seem to respond to anthropocentric--let alone modernist and post-modernist--assumptions and methodologies" (205-206). Love takes the position that we need to be critical of anthropocentric notions, especially the notion that human beings are so special that the earth exists solely for their comfort and disposal. Love argues that literary critics should pay more attention to a "nature-oriented" literature "because "one very important aspect of this literature is its regard--either implicit or stated--for the non-human" (205).

Love concludes, I think correctly, that ecological catastrophes like the Exxon Valdez oil spill and greater public environmental awareness will increasingly direct

literary critics "to reassess those texts--literary and critical--which ignore any values save for an earth-denying and ultimately destructive anthropocentrism" and to direct their attention towards that literature which "recognizes and dramatizes the integration of human with natural cycles" (211). But in this chapter, I would like to radically shift the perspective in current debates about what would constitute a "nature-oriented literature" and about the shape an "ecological criticism" will take.

Love cites the work of Willa Cather, Leslie Silko, Mary Austin, Robinson Jeffers, Wallace Stegner, Gary Snyder, and Gretel Erlich as examples of recent "nature-oriented" literature which recognizes "a natural otherness, a world of land and sky and organic life which exists outside human life, yet seems to command its allegiance" (209). However, as examples of the "growing interest in nature writing" among literary critics he cites The Norton Book of Nature Writing and This Incomparable Land (212). Both of these recent anthologies reinforce the impression held by many readers that "nature writing" is an exclusive and privileged style of literary prose "primarily practiced in the past two centuries by white males" who give specific attention to human/nature relationships and who frequently emphasize scientific observation of specific, physical details of pristine nature.⁵ As environmental ethicist and literary critic Patrick D.

Murphy points out, conventional definitions of "nature writing" lead the editors of these anthologies to exclude poetry, fiction, and the writings of Native Americans. One editor, Murphy notes, excludes the works of Native Americans because they do not convey a "sense of nature as a 'wilderness'" and because Native American writers make an inadequate "distinction . . . between fact and fiction" ("Voicing" 25). The "nature writers" who are predominantly represented in these anthologies are almost exclusively Anglo-European males--John Bertram, Thomas Nuttall, and John James Audobon--who write "realistic" non-fiction essays.

In The Rediscovery of North America, Barry Lopez acknowledges the invaluable contributions to natural history made by early Euro-American essayists, but eloquently sums up why their Eurocentric descriptions of the natural world are increasingly being recognized as problematic:

John Bertram, Thomas Nuttall, John James Audobon--all were able at least to describe what they found. But this extensive knowledge was ultimately regarded as . . . a series of puzzles for science to elucidate. It was never taken for what it in fact is--a description of home.⁶

Lopez's point is apt. The Americas could only be described with terms such as "pristine" and "uninhabited" after European pathogens and practices had depopulated lands once considered home by the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Those who are

currently engaged in ongoing discussions about the emerging shape of an "ecoliterary criticism" should be aware of how Eurocentric constructions of "nature" as "wilderness" rather than "home" and "nature writing" as "scientific" observation recorded in Waldenesque tranquility are shaping the terms of the debate in questionable ways.

For example, in his discussion of an "ecological criticism," Love cites Cheryl Burgess who observes that literary critics have "addressed the concerns of civil rights, equality for minorities, and women's liberation. . . . Race, class, and gender are the words which we see and hear everywhere at our professional meetings and in our current publications" (Qtd. in Love 202). Love concludes that "it does not seem unreasonable to suggest that the potential significance of such an [environmental] awareness for the reinterpretation and reformation of the literary canon could be far greater than any critical movement which we have seen thus far" (211). Burgess and Love are correct in saying that race, class, and gender are issues which are frequently discussed in the halls of academe and they are also correct to advocate that the same attention be given to environmental issues. However, I believe that the implication that "people issues" are separate from "environmental issues," that issues of race, class, and gender are widely separate from issues which concern the natural world, grows out of Eurocentric

notions of pristine, uninhabited "wilderness." The work of Leslie Silko--a Laguan Pueblo writer whose poems and fiction are often excluded from Eurocentrically-focused anthologies of "nature writing"--illustrates exactly why it is problematic to suggest that literary movements which work to end the oppressions of minorities, lower classes, and women, are somehow separate from or prior to an as-yet-to-be-recognized literary movement to end the oppression of nature.

In Silko's first novel, Ceremony, Tayo, the main protagonist, must crawl through a government fence surrounding huge mounds of uranium tailings to reach a "point of convergence" where he finally understands "a convergence of patterns."⁷ From this "point of convergence" in the Four Corners region of the Southwestern United States, Tayo puts together some of the pieces of the greedy Destroyers' "monstrous design" of destruction and death: a beautiful but deadly yellow mineral is brought up from deep inside the earth, scientists create an unimaginably destructive bomb in a top-secret laboratory deep in the Jemez mountains, a bomb is tested at Trinity Site in New Mexico, "people in cities twelve thousand miles away, victims who never [knew] these mesas" are devoured, water from the mines seeps out and contaminates the Pueblo people's groundwater, and Pueblo and Navajo miners contract lung cancer from breathing brightly colored dust (C 246) .

In her second novel, Almanac of the Dead, Silko again creates a character, Sterling, who travels to the same "point of convergence" in the Four Corner's region. Sterling has recently been exiled from his New Mexican Pueblo because Laguna elders are angry that he failed to protect a sacred sandstone snake from the prying cameras of a Hollywood filmcrew. However, at the end of the novel, he feels compelled to return to Laguna to visit the giant stone snake. Crawling through a barbed-wire fence that marks the boundaries of a gaping crater left by a now abandoned uranium mine, Sterling sees thirty foot mounds of virulently radioactive slag--uranium tailings which blow in breezes which carry them to the springs and to the Rio Paguete River. "Here was the new work of the Destroyers," Sterling thinks, "here was destruction and poison. Here was where life ended" (A 761). But remarkably, it had been here that the sacred sandstone snake had emerged.

By writing about Sterling's journey through a government fence to reach the same "point of convergence" where Tayo observes a "monstrous design" of destruction and death, Silko calls attention to the ways in which modern states claim the right to destroy lands and inflict suffering on millions of people in the name of scientific progress and development. Silko's stories counter the government's claims that the activities occurring inside "the fence" benefit "all"

mankind.⁸ This is a "nature-oriented literature" which does not conform to conventional Eurocentric definitions. There is no detached, "scientific" observation of "nature." Instead, this is a "nature writing" which explores the interconnections among forms and systems of domination, exploitation, and oppression across their different racial, sexual, and ecological manifestations. Indeed, this is a literature which asks readers to question all previous assumptions about "nature" as an uninhabited "wilderness" and "nature writing" as the "realistic" non-fiction prose of a scientifically, detached observer of "nature." This is a literature that reminds readers that the powerful entities which set boundaries around Indian reservations and build fences around uranium mines and military bombing ranges are the same entities which determine the boundaries of contemporary "wilderness areas."

In the reading of Almanac of the Dead which follows, I examine how Leslie Silko is writing exactly the kind of "nature-oriented literature" that offers a needed corrective to the destructive, anti-ecological tendencies of Western culture. I argue that Silko goes far beyond tranquil, "realistic" observation of a fast disappearing natural world. By creating and juxtaposing ancient Native American stories of emergence with modern Western tales of science and technology, Silko reveals how the interconnected oppressions of colonized

peoples, underclasses, women, and the environment are rooted in a modern state committed to science.

I offer this reading as one example of the kinds of ecological criticism that might be possible if we cease to let Eurocentric definitions of "wilderness" and "nature writing" influence our notions about the shape an ecological literary theory and practice might take. I posit that a responsible ecological literary criticism would necessarily integrate the interdisciplinary insights of various critical perspectives. My analysis explores how the most important shared theoretical premises of feminist historians of science Carolyn Merchant and Donna Haraway, feminist philosopher Lorraine Code, post-structuralist and post colonial theorists Michel Foucault and Edward Said, anthropologist Shiv Visvanathan and novelist Leslie Silko are related to each other, how they reinforce each other's premises, and pinpoint each other's blind spots. I use this "ecology of theories" to argue that Silko's novel answers Meeker's call for a "literary ecology" because it explores how the discourses of different cultures influence "human behavior and the natural environment" and how they play a role "in the welfare and survival" of human and nonhuman species (Meeker 3-4). At the same time, Silko's novel questions what constitutes the "natural environment" and demands a radical shift in critical perspectives about how literary critics might work for biospheric health.

II

In Almanac of the Dead, Leslie Marmon Silko creates an ancient "almanac" which has been passed down through several generations of Native Americans who continuously update and augment the information already included. The current "keepers of the almanac" are Lecha and Zeta, twin sisters who have received the almanac from their old, Yaqui grandmother, Yoeme. Old Yoeme tells Lecha and Zeta that the almanac came into the possession of the Yaqui people who live along the U.S./ Mexico border after four Mayan Indian girls who had been charged with the responsibility of protecting the stories and information which told the people "who they were and where they had come from" escaped to the north (A 246). Yoeme explains that at the beginning of the post-Columbian period which the people call "The Reign of the Death Eye Dog," alien invaders had enslaved or exterminated most of the people in the four girls' village but the few remaining elders claimed that "if even a part of their almanac survived, they as a people would return someday" (A 246). The elders instruct the girls to flee north with the almanac and the girls encounter many dangers along the way, including an emaciated old woman who is so deranged by the violence visited upon her village by European landowners and by the starvation which hounds her after all of her people have fled or died, that she seizes the opportunity to cannibalize one of the young girls. Yoeme

observes that the old woman "did not start out that way," but in the epoch of the Death-Eye Dog, "the possibility of becoming like her trails each one of us" (A 253).

Yoeme's story illustrates that violence is not specific to one culture, that violence can spread from one culture to another, and that the potential for violence exists in all cultures. Even while recounting horrifying tales of European violence committed against indigenous peoples during the 500 year "Reign of the Death Eye Dog," Yoeme refuses to romanticize or look uncritically at ancient Native American cultures. Referring to the elite, militaristic class of Mesoamerican kings and priests who sacrificed hundreds of people of lower classes or enemy city-states atop their massive pyramids or in elaborate ritual ballgames, Yoeme speculates that the violent practices of Mayan and Aztec cultures may have weakened the people and thus played a role in the bloody Spanish conquest of Mesoamerican high cultures.⁹ Yoeme tells Lecha and Zeta that when "the blood worshipers of Europe met the blood worshipers of the Americas" they "secretly knew one another" and that violent practices have been "the undoing of people here" and continue to be a problem "everywhere in the world" (A 570).

After listening to the sacred almanac's history, Lecha and Zeta understand why it is so important to protect the worm-eaten bundles of fragmented Mayan hieroglyphic almanacs,

sections of colonial American farmer's almanacs, worn notebooks, and boxes full of "yellowed newspaper clippings" about a sandstone snake which emerges from radioactive tailings, eco-warriors who work to undermine all those who profit from the "development" of the earth, scientists whose "secret agenda" is to build Alternative Earth Units, and a biotechnology business which sells human blood and organs for profit (A 570).¹⁰ Since the possibility of becoming like the demented, cannibal woman trails each one of us, each of us has a responsibility to fight against the violence that has spread and intensified during the "Reign of the Death Eye Dog." Those, like Lecha and Zeta, who take their responsibility seriously and who elect to join the fight must gain an understanding of how violence is justified and perpetuated; they must search for both the roots of the problem and clues to its solution by analyzing the beliefs and practices of all the cultures which have played a role in the events which have transpired in the Americas during the "Reign of the Death Eye Dog." The tattered, eclectic almanac which Lecha and Zeta have agreed to safeguard brings the traditions and beliefs of all these cultures together into one place to facilitate that analysis.

Lecha's and Zeta's struggle to gain a better understanding of the times in which they live through a close analysis of the materials included in the sacred almanac calls

Silko's readers' attention to what historian of science Donna Haraway describes as the urgent need to resist a "world-wide intensification of domination." Haraway advocates a "slightly perverse shift of perspectives" which brings together "contradictory standpoints" which "might better enable us to contest for meanings, as well as forms of power and pleasure in technologically mediated societies."¹¹ By bringing together the "contradictory standpoints" of the ancient and contemporary cultures of both indigenous American and Euroamerican peoples, the sacred almanac which has been continuously updated since the beginning of the "Reign of the Death Eye Dog" offers its "keepers" a better, more potentially complete perspective from which to contest for meanings in a world dominated by Western technological societies which have become increasingly violent, as one of the characters of Almanac of the Dead puts it, since "Truman dropped the atomic bombs" (A 628).

Silko explains that she chose to create an "almanac" at the center of her latest novel and frame her novel to reflect the shape and contents of Yoeme's almanac because she wanted to focus on the great social, political, and ecological "upheaval" which has effected both "weather and earth" and been the hallmark of the twentieth century.¹² Silko knew that for over 2000 years, when individuals of various cultures--including the ancient Mayans and the early European

American colonists--wanted to understand the earth's meteorological and ecological changes, ascertain how these changes affected them personally, and predict how they might bring themselves and their land into a more positive, harmonious relationship with the universe, they consulted the astrological calendars, weather forecasts, agricultural information, court schedules, tide tables, essays, verses, and other useful information which they found in their almanacs.¹³ Old Yoeme's almanac, Silko tells interviewer Laura Coltelli, is loosely based on the almanacs of both Native and European Americans--the beautifully inked, pre-Columbian hieroglyphic almanacs of the Mayans, the post-Columbian Books of the Chilam Balam which transformed ancient hieroglyphic Mayan texts into phonetic Mayan and Spanish texts, and the farmer's almanacs of the early European colonists of North America.¹⁴

Silko explains that after the Spanish had burned all the hieroglyphic almanacs which had served the Mayans as mnemonic codes for their most sacred astrological, calendrical, religious, and agricultural knowledge systems, the Mayans learned the languages being taught by the Catholic priests and used these new languages to clandestinely record everything they could remember from their ancient texts and oral traditions. But they did not stop there. Post-Columbian Mayan priests continuously added accounts of currently

unfolding historical events to their ancient creation stories and myths. The result of their efforts, historian Ronald Wright explains, were The Books of the Chilam Balam, which were written by a class of Yucatec Mayan priests known as the Chilam Balam or "jaguar priests." Bound in leather, these parchment texts were "living books" which were copied, recopied, and continuously expanded from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth and every Yucatec Mayan town of any size had one. These books "merged pre-Columbian and post-Columbian history" and were "part bible, part community charter, part almanac, part chronicle."¹⁵ Wright adds that the "jaguar priests" proclaimed that in the most ancient pre-Columbian texts, Mayan wise men had foreseen and recorded the European conquest; by revisiting their ancient prophecies, The Books of the Chilam Balam helped the Mayans establish "control over [contemporary] events that were otherwise uncontrollable" (165). Also, by merging pre-Columbian and post-Columbian history and by linking European conquest to other conquests which they had already suffered and survived, the Mayans created a unique genre of "prophecy-history" which served two purposes: "it is a powerful indictment of the European invasion, and its very seamlessness is a proclamation of resistance, an assurance that the Maya world continues" (Wright 165).

Early colonial American "farmer's almanacs" also made no

clear distinction between myth and history. From the time they were first published in the mid-1600s, writes Marion Stowell in The Colonial Weekday Bible, these almanacs exhibited many of the traits of Renaissance-era European and English almanacs.¹⁶ One of the most common features was a "chronology" which condensed the history of the world down to one page. Sources for these "histories" included both published European and English histories and oral traditions and myths. Some of the "events" recorded in the "chronology" include the slaying of the Minotaur, the rape of Lucretia, and the conquests of Alexander and Caesar.¹⁷ By rooting Old Yoeme's almanac in ancient Mayan almanacs and early colonial American farmer's almanacs, Silko is accorded great creative latitude in which to write a sweeping "chronology" of the five-hundred year post-Columbian period which is the backdrop of her novel and to freely juxtapose oral traditions and myths with written histories.

The almanac that comes into Lecha's and Zeta's possession, then, is a proclamation of resistance, an assurance that, as Zeta puts it, "For five hundred years, the resistance had fought" (A 178). This is a "living book" which has been passed down through generations of Native American "keepers of the almanac" who continuously update its ancient mythical/historical contents with any current events, narratives, or any other information which the "keepers"

decide might be important and useful in the fight against violent practices. Like the old Mayan almanacs, Silko tells Coltelli, Yoeme's almanac is a book which will be used not only to understand the movements of the sun and stars and the earth's seasonal cycles, not only "for auspicious planting," but also to make predictions about "famine and death, revolution and conquest" (151). In the tradition of the most ancient of "American" almanacs, it is a book of "prophecy-history" which will "[project] into the future" in order to make prognostications about our own day (Coltelli 152).

Silko's authorial decision to loosely pattern Old Yoeme's almanac on texts like The Books of the Chilam Balam is also rooted in her own peoples' familiarity with the characteristic qualities of "prophecy-history." Though Silko's people, the Laguna Pueblo of the American Southwest, did not record their traditions, stories, and histories in books as did the Mayan "Jaguar Priests," Silko remembers learning very early how myth and history, the old and new, and discourses from both ancient and modern American cultures could be merged to create a powerful indictment of destructive, colonial practices. Like the young Mayan boys who were denied the ancient hieroglyphic writing systems of their ancestors, Silko was sent at the age of five to a Bureau of Indian Affairs Day School where she was not allowed to speak the Keresan language of her grandparents. She soon lost her ability to speak Keresan but remembers that,

at home, she was still surrounded by people "talking and telling, relating incidents and stories" (Silko, "Poetics" 23). And what they talked about, "over and over in every possible way," Silko stresses, was "the fact that their land had been stolen" (Silko, "Poetics" 23).

To prove Laguna claims that thousands of acres of their land had been stolen by Spanish, Mexican, and American colonial settlers, and later, by the U.S. government, Silko's father and her Aunt Susie, among others, worked with lawyers, folklorists, anthropologists, and other scholars involved in the Indian Claims actions of the 1950s and 60s to record ancient stories which had been passed down orally from one generation to the next. Before the United States Congress created the Indian Claims Commission by the Act of August 13, 1946, no tribe of American Indians could bring a suit against the United States without the special permission of Congress. As Myra Jenkins' "A History of Laguna Pueblo Land Claims" amply documents, the United States did occasionally take legal action against settlers who encroached on Laguna Pueblo land, but judges almost never decided in favor of the Lagunas. For all intents and purposes, then, the 1946 Act opened the doors of America's courts to the landclaims of Native American tribes for the first time and the Claims Commission was created to determine each group's aboriginal rights to certain geographical regions or areas within the United States.

Lawyers and scholars for both the plaintiffs and the government worked to amass evidence for the 370-odd court actions. Each side collected evidence on the nature of aboriginal use and occupancy of particular areas in order to determine which Indian groups were entitled to compensation for lands taken by the United States. Large quantities of previously "unknown" or unexamined Indian agency and other files, personal correspondence, oral traditions, photographs, diaries, and so on were uncovered and their contents incorporated in the reports. Regular archival and library resources were examined and reexamined with a thoroughness that would not have been possible without the support that both claimants and defendants were able to provide.¹⁸

Once recorded in reports which became official United States court documents, the stories of Silko's people, about the sacred place of emergence, about ancient shrines where the people have always worshipped, and about places where the people have always lived, hunted, and worked, became the crucial foundation of the Laguna peoples' legal claims against the United States government and others who had encroached upon their traditional lands (Silko, "Poetics" 24-25). Silko remembers that she learned the Laguna people's most ancient stories as she listened to them being told at home or prepared for New Mexican courtrooms but, perhaps even more importantly, she learned that the old stories were not just incidentally

entertaining, they "were important in terms . . . of getting the land back" (Silko, "Poetics" 24).

Like The Books of the Chilam Balam, the stories which Aunt Susie and other Laguna storytellers submit as evidence in court proceedings against the United States government are a powerful indictment and proclamation of resistance to those powerful Western discourses--science, law, anthropology, religion, philosophy--which have been so deftly used to authorize the conquest, colonization, and domination of non-European lands and peoples. The New Mexican courtroom--like the "point of convergence" in Ceremony--becomes a place in which the contradictory standpoints of ancient myth and modern scholarship are brought together to create a kind of "prophecy-history" which better enables the Laguna people to fight for the lands which ensure their survival as a people and a culture. The stories Aunt Susie transforms into court documents and the almanac which Silko creates in her latest novel illustrate that those who would work to resist a world-wide "intensification of domination" must not be afraid of contradictory standpoints. As Haraway explains, in the twentieth century, the

political struggle is to see from both perspectives at once because each reveals both dominations and possibilities unimaginable from the other vantage point. Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision

or many-headed monsters. (Simians 154)

III

In both the ancient Mayan almanacs and early colonial American almanacs, the astrological, calendrical, and agricultural information included was calculated according to the position of the stars and planets for the local area in which the almanac was to be used. Although Silko's "keepers of the almanac" include accounts of events which occur on both American continents among the bundles of ancient Mayan hieroglyphic parchments and colonial American farmer's almanacs, the almanac is calculated for the American Southwest. One of the "newspaper clippings" added by the keepers to the almanac reports the recent emergence of a giant sandstone snake from huge mounds of virulently radioactive tailings near the Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico. By emerging into one of the world's largest now-abandoned uranium mines, the sacred snake brings together the contradictory standpoints of the Laguna people and Euroamerican scientists and developers and calls attention to the profound irony that the land of the Pueblo people, whose creation myths tell them that their ancestors migrated up through underground worlds to emerge from the sipapo, or sacred place from which all life emerges, should be selected by the U.S. government to become the place where mines were sunk deep into the earth to extract the very substance that could destroy all life.¹⁹

Sterling, Lecha and Zeta's Laguna Pueblo gardener, recalls that Laguna elders "had cried when the U.S. government had opened the mine" and that "the mine had devoured entire mesas. 'Leave our Mother Earth alone,' the old folks had tried to warn, "'otherwise terrible things will happen to us all'" (A 759). But the Laguna people's knowledge is discounted by scientists who cloak the conquest, colonization, and domination of people and lands in what environment ethicist Jim Birch calls "Western culture's favorite story about itself": the story that scientific progress and development bring light and order to the wild darknesses of savagery.²⁰ Despite protest from Laguna elders, scientists working for the United States government continued their work in the Jemez mountains and "Before the end of the war," notes Sterling, "the old folks had seen the first atomic explosion--the flash brighter than any sun--followed weeks later by the bombs that had burned up a half a million Japanese" (A 759).

By surfacing in an area of the American Southwest which had become so radioactively contaminated by 1972 that the Nixon administration sought to have it designated an uninhabitable "National Sacrifice Area," the snake emerges squarely in the wake of one of the most astonishing examples of single vision of the twentieth century--the race to create and test the most devastating bomb and, later, the most deadly arsenal in the history of humankind.²¹ Positioning

themselves as perfectly detached and unbiased, U.S. government scientists and developers claimed to be working to save mankind but they chose to ignore the destruction of the Navajo and Pueblo peoples and lands where they were working. And later, after the end of World War II, explain Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill, multinational corporations which supplied the uranium to fuel the escalating arms race moved into energy-rich American Indian reservations where local populations had already been made economically dependent by enforced federal programs of education, housing, and land management. These corporations were easily able to convert local populations and economies into "economic hostages" by creating jobs which provide, in some communities, up to 80% of the local income (LaDuke and Churchill 115).

Because multinational corporations rely on technologically oriented extraction and transportation of inorganic raw materials which are usually not processed in the same location where they are mined, these companies can refuse to acknowledge the relationship between the mineral wealth which they extract and the local people's health, community and economy. The "subject peoples and their environment become expendable" (LaDuke and Churchill 112). The giant Anaconda Corporation, for example, could abruptly close down its operation at Laguna without regard for the local people and move to South America in 1980 to take advantage of newly

discovered uranium fields and cheaper labor; but the Laguna people could not simply move away. They had no choice but to breath the dusty, windblown tailings which still today retain up to 85% of the original ore's radioactivity (LaDuke and Churchill 126). They must still drink water supplies which, according to the EPA, have all "been dangerously contaminated by radioactivity" (LaDuke and Churchill 125). The Rio Paguete River can no longer provide the basis for a thriving tribal agriculture because it "runs through the unclaimed ruins of corporate flight" (LaDuke and Churchill 124). And any profits the Laguna people may have accumulated during Anaconda's relatively brief tenure on their land have been quickly consumed by the ongoing clean-up of their land and water supply and by skyrocketing medical costs.²²

When Silko's people took their landclaims into U.S. courtrooms, numerous judges, lawyers, scholars, and other "experts" debated the merits of their suits in order to determine the boundaries of their "reservation." When the Laguna people protested the sinking of mining test holes so close to the sacred place of emergence, scientists, positioning themselves as the perfectly objective, determined that the United States government must nevertheless move ahead with plans to cordon off Pueblo land so that research and testing could be conducted in secrecy. The sandstone snake's emergence inside a fenced-off uranium mine, then, calls

attention to how scientifically trained "experts" employed by the modern state claim a mandate to carry out what Shive Visvanathan has described as a kind of "social triage" which authorizes a deliberate "decision or act of state to define a target group, such as a minority within its territory, as dispensable."²³ But as Sterling sits on a tailings mound contemplating the snake, he begins to understand how the stories the people tell about snake's return, like the documents which the Laguna people created for the Indian Claims Commission landsuits, become a site of resistance to the violence of displacement imposed on his people by governments and corporations.

While Sterling turns to his people's most ancient stories to gain an understanding of why a sandstone snake has emerged in an abandoned uranium mine, "keepers of the almanac" like Lecha and Zeta turn to the sacred bundles of Mayan parchment fragments and other miscellaneous information that have been passed down to them to learn what the snake's emergence might portend. Lecha and Zeta, the granddaughters of a powerful Yaqui curandera, are aware that many Yaqui and Pueblo peoples still believe that snakes keep bodies of water clear and free flowing. But those who believe in the watersnake's power know that if even slightly molested, a water snake will disappear and the bodies of water that it had watched over will simply dry up. Sterling's elders believe that the snake which has

suddenly appeared at the mine is Maahastryu, the water snake who once loved and cared for the Laguna people but who disappeared long ago when "jealous neighbors" had disturbed, then drained the beautiful but now dry Laguna lake (A 761). As stories about the snake's return spread, Sterling's people joyously transgress the mine's fence to bring the snake regular offerings of turquoise, white shell, and corn pollen (A 92, 761).

The sandstone snake's emergence out of the very tailings which have radioactively contaminated the Laguna people's watersupply leads Sterling and Lecha to speculate that since the snake has positioned its head pointing south, it is insisting that the people remember that the giant snake has a "connection with Mexico" and the great Mesoamerican plumed serpent, Quetzalcoat1 (A 759). By examining the ancient Mayan parchments and remembering Pueblo and Yaqui oral traditions, Sterling and "keepers of the almanac" like Lecha and Zeta are reminded that hundreds of years before the first contact of Columbus with the indigenous peoples of the Americas, the high cultures of Mesoamerica had deliberately introduced Quetzalcoat1, the god of water, winds, morning, twins, monsters, and the planet Venus to the Pueblo peoples. Today, notes Miguel Leon-Portilla, Quetzalcoat1 still stands defiantly aboriginal, the omnipresent symbol of Mesoamerican religiosity, the supreme Our Father-Our Mother, invoked by

millions of Mesoamericans, using several names.²⁴ According to Leon-Portilla, Quetzalcoatl seems to have been introduced into what is now the American Southwest along trade routes after the great Mayan city-states mysteriously collapsed around 900 A.D. and Mesoamerican high culture spread as people dispersed. Pueblo cultures which assimilated elements of Mesoamerican culture can thus be viewed as having lived in the northern outskirts of Mesoamerican high culture (Leon-Portilla 164). So the sandstone snake's sudden appearance at a uranium mine near the Laguna Pueblo is a stunning reminder that the "American Southwest" had not not always been the "Southwest" at all. Once, it had been the far north; once, notes Sterling, it "was Mexico" (A 759, emphasis Silko's).²⁵

As Lecha analyzes the ancient and contemporary materials included in the almanac and Sterling contemplates his people's oral traditions, they both struggle to gain a better understanding of how to stem the violence that has been pervasive since the beginning of the "Reign of the Death Eye Dog." They note that even though governments and corporations and the "experts" in their employ have claimed the power to determine the borders of Native American Indian reservations, appropriate land for military research and testing, erect fences, and contaminate precious groundwater, they could not banish the water snake forever. Looking south in the direction that the snake is facing, Sterling thinks of

the hundreds of indigenous peoples and mestizos who are crossing the U.S. border each day (A 735). He concludes from the snake's reappearance and from the stories about snakes that his aunties told him when he was a child, that the great sandstone snake is a manifestation of the resurgence of Indian peoples in the Americas. The snake may have disappeared for a time, but when snakes are underground, they hear "the voices of the dead," the stories of the "sixty million dead souls who howl for justice in America" (A 130, 723). Lecha's reading of the ancient creation stories which Mayan scribes struggled to record confirms that there is a power that "resides in [the peoples'] stories" and ensures that the living will remember and retell them (A 581). Lecha and Sterling conclude that the snake's message to the people is that the struggle of the oppressed against those who would usurp the cultures, lands, and resources of indigenous peoples will be powered by stories that emerge, like the snake, from the earth--stories that are grounded in the land the people have inhabited for centuries, stories of the gods and the ancestors, stories of ancient shrines and contemporary communities, stories of oppression, but most importantly, stories of the peoples' resistance to oppression (A 763).

From the ancient stories about Quetzalcoatl which Mayan priests transformed into Spanish and recorded in the Books of the Chilam Balam as an act of resistance which insisted that

the Mayan world continued despite Spanish conquest and colonization to the story of a snake defiantly positioned inside a multinational corporation's fenced uranium mine but looking south to an ancient Mesoamerican kingdom, the sacred almanac which Lecha possesses insists that for five hundred years, Native American people have resisted domination and continued to espouse beliefs and practice lifestyles which are refractory to Western culture's scientific notions of "progress." Each of the stories included in the almanac, whether ancient or contemporary, proclaim to the politician or chief executive officer that for tribal peoples, "land is not real estate or a space over which people can be moved like objects. Land is memory, a map of one's world, a way of life for which people are willing to die" (Visvanathan 54). Stories which are literally rooted in lands that the people have inhabited for centuries, then, become a powerful form of resistance to projects or developments which would separate peoples from the lands in which their cultures are deeply rooted.

Lecha's analysis of the almanac for clues to the meaning of the snake's message illustrates that, like Michel Foucault, Edward Said, and Shiv Visvanathan, Silko is interested in how "local, regional knowledges" challenge what Visvanathan calls the scientific mandate of the modern "laboratory state" (58).²⁶ In the Almanac, Silko writes about a "Holistic

Healers Convention" in Tucson, Arizona, which is attended by Lecha, Zeta, Sterling, a group of eco-warriors, a leader of a group of Mayan revolutionaries, some Celtic healers, Yupik medicine men and women, and many others of all races and cultures who are interested in working for a healthier, less violent, more ecologically balanced world. One of the main convention speakers, a barefoot Hopi medicine man, addresses the subjects of activism and terrorism and asks whether or not giant governmental and/or corporate development projects--such as hydroelectric dams and their accompanying resettlement programs or nuclear bombing ranges which displace and/or irradiate human and non-human species--might be considered terrorism. The Hopi states:

The eco-warriors have been accused of terrorism in the cause of saving Mother Earth. So I want to talk a little about terrorism first. Poisoning our water with radioactive wastes, poisoning our air with military weapons' wastes, those are acts of terrorism! Acts of terrorism committed by governments against their citizens all over the world. (A 733-34)

Here, Silko's character is arguing for the necessity of new concepts of civil rights, something very similar to what Shiv Visvanthan has called "a civil rights movement against development-as-terrorism, based on the recognition that the modern state committed to science has become the prime anti-

ecological force in the world" (57).

To understand how the West obtains a mandate of power which justifies the appropriation of lands and the imposition of suffering on millions in the name of scientific development, Visvanathan argues that it is necessary to understand how vivisection as a scientific method anticipated the "vivisectional imperatives of planning and development" in the modern state (47). To understand these imperatives, one must look back to the influential tracts of Francis Bacon, Rene Descartes, and Thomas Hobbes. This is exactly why Silko's "keepers of the almanac," who are seeking to understand the roots of the violence which continues to be practice in the "Reign of the Death Eye Dog," include sections of early colonial American almanacs in their sacred almanac (A 570). The "new science" of thinkers like Bacon and Descartes which was being taught in European universities and at Harvard university were debated on the pages of colonial farmer's almanacs throughout the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century. The "new science," however was by no means universally accepted, writes Marion Stowell in The Colonial Weekday Bible, and opposing scientific views were sometimes printed together in the same almanac (ix, 44, 163).²⁷

In order to work for a less violent, more ecologically balanced world, Silko's "keepers" must understand the

contradictory standpoints of both Native American and European worldviews. Silko does not describe the colonial almanacs included in Lecha's almanac in detail, but some sections of the "proliferation of farmer's almanacs" (A 570) are likely to have included essays describing Bacon's rules for the experimental method. Making reference to the investigations into witchcraft going on in his day, Bacon, in a telling passage of his own work, analyzes what can be learned from the witchcraft trials:

. . . howsoever the use and practice of such arts is to be condemned, yet from the speculation and consideration of them . . . a useful light may be gained, not only for a true judgement of the offenses of persons charged with such practices, but likewise for the further disclosing of the secrets of nature. Neither ought a man to make scruple of entering and penetrating into these holes and corners, when the inquisition of truth is his whole object. (Qtd. in Death 168, emphasis added)

Imaging nature as a woman, Bacon argued that the new man of science must not think of the "inquisition of nature" as in any way interdicted or forbidden and must bind Nature "into service," make her a "slave," and discover her "plots and secrets." In bold sexual imagery which is still the language used today to praise a scientist's "hard facts," "penetrating mind," or the "thrust of his argument," Bacon postulated a

program of scientific study that would be a foundation for the progress and advancement of "the whole of mankind." In his treatise, New Atlantis, Bacon dreamed of a community in which scientific administration would replace politics and all decision would be made by scientists, whose judgement and vision was to be trusted implicitly, for they alone possessed the "secrets" of nature.²⁸

By examining debates about the "new science" included in early colonial American almanacs, the "keepers" would also learn that Descartes captured the philosophical implications of the machine and outlined a plan for reducing complexity in the universe. His method assumed that a problem could be simplified by abstracting it from its complicating environmental context, then dividing it into as many parts as needed to resolve the problem (Death 231). Descartes, who considered the dissection of animals more enlightening than the study of conventional books, gave vivisection--the inflicting of pain on "lesser animals" for the purpose of scientific research--its imprimatur (Visvanathan 43). Visvanathan explains that vivisection as a scientific method has inherent in it the idea of indifference and this idea acquired a permanent status in Western science; indeed, the practice of vivisection became so frequent and banal that Visvanathan argues that it anticipated the "Fordification" of the concentration camp (48, 43).²⁹

By including the ongoing debates about European scientific and social theories which were printed on the pages of eighteenth and nineteenth century American farmer's almanacs, the "keepers" would have also learned that the philosophical foundation of the modern state committed to science was only complete with the work of Thomas Hobbes who conceived the idea of a society based on the scientific method. Hobbes posited that nature was a state of anarchy, a chaos of meanings, emotions, hallucinations, and that, in a state of nature, man is an enemy to every other man. In Leviathan, Hobbes explains that to combat the conditions of nature and man's natural self-interest, people must submit to the absolute supremacy of the state in both secular and religious matters. Hobbes believed that the new political and moral order could not be established until all dark places of sedition were eradicated. For Hobbes, sedition included such unscientific and irrational beliefs as primitive Christianity, Aristotelianism, witchcraft, occult sciences, and all other bacchanalia of the mythopoetic imagination. "Progress" is defined linearly as moving away from a past replete with seditious beliefs and practices and towards modernity. As a result of this linear concept of "progress," writes Visvanathan, "non-scientific" civilizations or "tribal cultures come to be seen as 'contemporary ancestors,' the past the West has already lived out. The West, the modern West, is

in turn the future these societies will encounter" (41).

The barefoot Hopi medicine man's convention tirade against those who authorize development projects and military installations and insist that people are dispensable and can be separated from the lands in which their cultures are deeply rooted for "the good of all" illustrates that Silko is critical of Western European notions of "progress" which demand the summoning of all seditious "others" into modernity. Like Foucault, she is interested in how stories that are literally grounded in a people's specific land and culture--like the "local, regional knowledges" included in Lecha's almanac--challenge the state's scientific mandate for "progress." Foucault observes that by the eighteenth century, European philosophers and theorists recognized that if the state was too violent in its march towards progress, it would risk "provoking revolts" and if it intervened in too discontinuous a manner, it risked allowing the "politically costly phenomena of resistance and disobedience to develop in the interstices" (155). The problem for the state, then, was not so much "to punish wrongdoers as to prevent even the possibility of wrongdoing" and "refuse to tolerate areas of darkness" (154).

Foucault explains that Europeans exercised an economical form of power just by virtue of knowing things (154). For Foucault, Jeremy Bentham's notion of the Panopticon in which

the radiating wings of an entire prison can be surveyed from a single central tower, is paradigmatic of the way in which European science and scholarship produced the effect of the dominating, examining look of the cultural overseer.³⁰ Just as the Panopticon uses "a form close to that of the castle--a keep surrounded by walls--to paradoxically create a space of exact legibility" (Foucault 154), European scientists and scholars, in a sense, fenced the "other," separated him from his surround, and minutely examined all the parts of his life for the purpose of scientific research. In this way, Visvanathan writes, the "West as modernity obtains the mandate of power and responsibility over this world left behind by history. It is science as the modern man's 'gaze' that brings the primitive and the archaic back into contemporaneity" (41).

However, as the Laguna peoples' insistence that mesas must not be ripped open and the earth must be respected or "terrible things will happen to us all" illustrates (A 759), societies and cultures are often refractory to the scientific gaze. Underlying the modern state and the notion of science is a monolithic worldview which cannot permit competing sites of power or grant the "legitimacy of folk or ethnic knowledge" (Visvanathan 53). Obsolescence is encoded in the notion of progress and development and the "other" must either acculturate, assimilate, or disappear. When cultures do resist the monolithic worldview, these cultures are

categorized as incapable of science and the idea of triage, which lurks quietly within modernity as a scientific project is revealed. Visvanathan writes:

Triage has been the silent term mediating between the ideas of vivisection and progress. Vivisection as an experiment has inherent in it the idea of indifference, and progress implies obsolescence. Triage interweaves these ideas as the obsolescence of those one is indifferent to. (Visvanathan 48)

And in the process of moving "other" cultures toward assimilation or "peaceful" development, Visvanathan points out, "more refugees have been created than in bloody wars" (54).

But the obsolescence encoded in "progress" has no place for memory, no place for an almanac which insists that the ancient Mayan world might has been carried forward into the contemporary Southwest. As Edward Said observes, the aim of Orientalist discourses which give the scientist, expert, or developer power over subject peoples is to get hold "of the whole sprawling panorama" (240). But for this to happen, the object of study cannot move or develop; it must be a stable, static, unchanging. This is why Orientalists reduce the Orient to an essence and why "empirical data about the Orient or about any of its parts count for very little; what matters and is decisive is what I have been calling the Orientalist

vision" (Said 69). But against this "static system of synchronic essentialism," there is constant pressure and the "source of the pressure is narrative" (240). Said writes:

Narrative asserts the power of men to be born, develop, and die, the tendency of institutions and actualities to change, the likelihood that modernity and contemporaneity will finally overtake "classical" civilizations; above all, it asserts that the domination of reality by vision is no more than a will to power, a will to truth and interpretation, and not an objective condition of history. (240)

In her Almanac, Silko illustrates how local, regional, folk knowledges counter the panoptic, scientific vision of the "expert" and deny the obsolescence encoded in "scientific progress" by juxtaposing stories about Serlo, a "scientist" with complete indifference to "the fate of insignificant beings" (A 550), side by side with stories about how Sterling and his people must now live amidst giant, radioactive tailings piles and drink radioactive water. Serlo is a member of a an elitist group whose cornerstone is secrecy (A 548), a group which runs a research institute dedicated to preserving the "sangre pura" or "blue blood" (A 542) of a fast disappearing European nobility. The group has only a "few more years to prepare before the world was lost to chaos" (A 561) and so they are racing against time to design and build

"Alternative Earth modules" which will orbit high above the earth and be "capable of remaining cut off from earth for years if necessary while upheaval and violence" perpetrated by swarms of "brown people . . . threatened those of superior lineage" (A 543). Serlo and other "biosphere tycoons" are busily collecting "rare species of plants, birds, and animals so the richest people on earth could bail out of the pollution and revolutions and retreat to orbiting paradise islands of glass and steel" (A 728). When the earth nears complete depletion, these elite "scientists" plans to harvest "what little pure water and pure air still [remains]" and take them to the "space colonies" to "protect" them from "the pollution on the earth" (A 728, emphasis added).³¹

It is no accident that Serlo and his secretive group of scientists are involved in a project that begs comparisons to Francis Bacon's utopian New Atlantis or the feverish race at Los Alamos to develop and test the nuclear bomb in a New Mexican desert inhabited by Pueblo peoples. Bacon envisioned the creation of "totally artificial environments created by and for humans" (Death 186) in which decisions would be made "for the good of the whole by the scientists, whose judgment was to be trusted implicitly, for they alone possessed the secrets of nature" (Death 180-181). J. Robert Oppenheimer's explanation about why scientists rushed to complete the atomic bomb even after Nazi Germany was no longer a threat echoes

Bacon's call for scientists, who possess the secrets of nature and, therefore, a panoptic, "objective" vision, to make decisions for the good of all. Oppenheimer recalls that

the reason that we did this job is because it was an organic necessity. If you are a scientist you cannot stop such a thing. If you are a scientist you believe that it is good to find out how the world works; that it is good to find out what the realities are; that it is good to turn over to mankind at large the greatest possible power to control the world and to deal with it according to its lights and values.³²

But as Brian Easlea explains, Los Alamos physicists did not turn over this power to mankind at large, they turned it over "to a handful of very economically privileged and powerful white male Americans" (90).

By juxtaposing stories about Serlo's elitist vision of a future cut off from a polluted and overpopulated earth with "local, regional" stories about a snake with ties to Mexico, Silko questions national borders, reservation boundaries, corporate mining fences, man-made biospheres and all other panoptic enclosures which presuppose the existence and maintenance of a position of power from which to create and then control a "space of exact legibility" (Foucault 154). The stories collected by Silko's "keepers" counter the vivisectional imperative of a government's official claim to

be working in the Four Corner area for the good of the American people, for the good of mankind.³³ Regional stories and knowledge, then, politicize the government's activities and expose the way in which the modern state committed to science bestows on the scientist, who is "venerated as the perfectly unbiased representative of nature," the privilege of testifying about the right to life and death" ("Monsters" 312). Silko shows that "reality" and the "facts about it" always result from "a social negotiation for meaning between people who confront one another from different cultural contexts and idiosyncratic personal histories. . . . [W]hat is represented depends on one's position in the field of negotiation."³⁴

Silko doesn't discount science or advocate that we all "go back to nature" or "pre-contact" times. Her Yupik medicine woman, for example, is not afraid of her joint kinship with animals and machines. She utilizes whatever tools necessary to ensure her people's survival in the Alaskan Tundra--whether that means computers, satellite dishes, or a piece of weasel fur (A 159).³⁵ Silko understands that, in the words of Evelyn Fox Keller, "science works extraordinarily well" and effectively "meets so many of the goals set for it."³⁶ The problem with Western science and with other hegemonic discourses--law, religion, philosophy, anthropology--explains Foucault, is not the contents, methods, or concepts

they produce but rather their effects once they get centralized and linked to institutions and the vehemence with which they seek to deny the history or "geneology" of the intellectual, cultural and institutional "struggles" out of which they emerge (81-84). Silko illustrates that Western science, perched high in a panoptic position, lacks a developed sense of communitas, a sense of the sacred, a vision of an ecological society, or a sense of the earth as a commons. She shows that "biospherian tycoons," caught up in a Hobbesian pursuit of their own interests, increasingly aware of ecological depletion and scarcity and the growing threat to the "social good," lack any sense of the way in which traditional communities, like the Laguna, worked for the total community, not the individual. For these traditional communities, writes Visvanathan, "It was a matter of community ethic for group survival, which meant that it was based on what they contributed to the environment--what they gave, and not what they took" (51).

The diverse groups of people who come together at the Holistic Healer's Convention to work for a more balanced, less violent world, do not come together with a sense of ecology as a managerial science; they recognize that the legal systems which have claimed a scientific mandate to set national borders, determine reservations boundaries, initiate massive development projects which displace hundreds or hundreds of

thousands of people, and even establish wilderness areas cannot be the basis for ecology. Instead, they come together with a sense of ecology as communitas. They meet on the premise that science, like all culturally constructed discourses, is and must be recognized as a local, regional knowledge which is part of wider webs of relation. Like historians of science Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, Silko is advocating "a successor science," a science that acknowledges that the place from which one speaks, indeed that one's race, class, gender, culture, education, economic status, and literal geographic environment affect the meaning and truth of what one says.

In lectures and readings which she travels all over the world to deliver, Leslie Silko argues for a radical shift of perspective by urging her audiences to examine how the vivisectional imperative undergirds the violence which now permeates all the communities of the world. Silko asks her audiences to see rape and murder "side by side with what's been done to cultures and populations and geography" and argues that if we want to stop the violation of human rights that is rampant around the world, then we will also have to "stop tearing mountains to pieces" ("Poetics" 52-53). In short, Silko asks her audiences to explore the interconnections among forms and systems of domination, exploitation, and oppression across their different racial,

sexual, and ecological manifestations.

Almanac of the Dead clearly shows that expendable populations will be expended and National sacrifice areas will be sacrificed unless the vivisectional imperatives of planning and development which are so important to the modern state committed to science are exposed as contested and contestable. Silko's fictional book of "prophecy-history" brings together contradictory ancient and modern, indigenous and European standpoints to argue that the discourse of science or any other powerful discourse is contested and contestable and that we must admit into our discourses the cacophonous visions and visionary voices that characterize the knowledges of the subjugated. The result will be that we will reveal unexpected openings and possibilities for a larger vision, a more adequate, richer, better account of the world in which we all live.

IV

Though not what we would immediately think of as a "theoretical text," I believe that Silko's fictional almanac should be considered an example of both a "nature-oriented literature" which offers a needed corrective to the anti-ecological tendencies of Western culture and an example of "ecological literary theory" which suggests that an "ecological literary criticism" might begin with an examination of "nature themes" in literature. But a

responsible ecological criticism would go further than this. What we would analyze, is how a text is positioned in the complex material, cultural, historical, scientific, institutional, geographical, and ecological environments we all inhabit. Almanac of the Dead suggests that a responsible ecological literary theory would view texts not as some kind of transcendent, panoptic vision but, like both the ancient Mayan almanacs and early colonial American almanacs, as texts which are calculated for a specific place, texts constructed by a specific people and culture, texts which offer a "place from which to see."³⁷

NOTES

1. From the poem, "That's the Place the Indians Talk About," in Woven Stone (324).

2. Ceremony (191).

3. "The Problem of Speaking for Others" (6). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text as "Problems."

4. More recently, Patrick D. Murphy has brought a broad knowledge of environmental ethics to bear on his analysis of contemporary American literature. In "Prolegomenon for an Ecofeminist Dialogics" and "Ground, Pivot, Motions: Ecofeminist Theory, Dialogics and Literary Practice," Murphy argues persuasively that Bakhtinian dialogics coupled with ecofeminism or an "ecofeminist dialogics" which gives voice to women/nature/other would "break down the Cartesian dualistic thinking of patriarchy that perpetuates the exploitation and oppression of nature in general and women in particular" ("Prolegomenon" 53).

5. Quoted from Patrick D. Murphy, "Native Americans and Nature Writing: Time to Stop Excluding the Original Inhabitants of North American" (5-6). Murphy points out that anthologies like Robert

Finch and John Elder's The Norton Book of Nature Writing and Thomas J. Lyon's This Incomparable Land focus on a group of alienated Anglo-European authors whose "model of otherness is based purely on a psychoanalytic/cultural model of alienation and distance, the standard Western patriarchal, androcentric Cartesian kind of binary opposition" (6). In "Voicing Another Nature," Murphy proposes instead that "if nature writing is defined not on the basis of some notion of objective observation or record of immediate direct experience . . . but on the basis of exploration of the relationships among nature, including human interaction with and attitudes about the other parts of nature" (28), then the "canon" of "nature writing," (indeed, the generic and modal prescriptive definitions of literature itself) would have to be critiqued and rethought ("Nature Writing" 7). Subsequent references to these articles cited parenthetically as "Nature Writing" and "Voicing."

6. In The Rediscovery of North America (31).

7. Ceremony (246, 254). The tailing piles outside the Laguna Pueblo that Silko describes in Ceremony are located at the now abandoned Jackpile uranium mine which opened in 1952 and which was once the largest in the world. For more about the effects that uranium mining has had on Pueblo and Navajo people, see Simon J. Ortiz, Woven Stone (22, 354-356). Subsequent references to Ceremony cited parenthetically as "C" in the text. References to Almanac of the Dead will be cited parenthetically as "A" in the text.

8. The discussion which follows will make clear why I am intentionally using the word, "mankind" instead of the more inclusive "humankind."

9. See Michael D. Coe, Breaking the Maya Code, (65-66, 270).

10. Silko writes that when Leche closely inspects the ancient almanac which has been delivered into her hands by her Yaqui grandmother, Old Yoeme, she discovers that it includes whole sections stolen from "the proliferation of 'farmer's almanacs,' " several old delapidated notebooks, fragments of parchment covered with strange hieroglyphic markings, and stacks of yellowed newspaper clippings (A 570). For a more detailed examination of the Mayan and early colonial American sources of Silko's almanac, see Chapter 1.

11. Simians, Cyborgs and Women (154). Subsequent references to this text cited parenthetically in the text as Simians. Subsequent references to Haraway's "The Promises of Monsters: A Regenerative

Politics for Inappropriate/d Others" cited parenthetically as "Monsters."

12. In the "Poetics and Politics" seminar which Silko gave in Tucson, Arizona, at the University of Arizona, on April 6, 1992, she said she was interested in seeing how we might find ways to live through this time of great violence and upheaval in the "weather and the earth" (22). For more information about the "Poetics and Politics" seminar at which Silko made these statements, see Chapter 1, note 12. Subsequent references to the transcript of this seminar will be cited parenthetically in the text as Silko, "Poetics."

13. For brief histories of the almanac, see Bernard Capp's English Almanacs, 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press (215-238) and Marion Stowell's Early American Almanacs: The Colonial Weekday Bible (3-12).

14. Coltelli (151-152). Many of these ancient Mayan almanacs or codices, writes Michael Coe in Breaking the Maya Code were carved in stone or inked on parchment during the Mayan's "Classic Age" from 300 A.D. to 900 A.D. before the mysterious collapse of their civilization. After the collapse, the Mayans no longer carved their histories or calendars into stone, but they continued to make parchment books up until the time of Spanish conquest. For more on the contents of Mayan almanacs, see Coe, (265). For more on The Books of the Chilam Balam see Ronald Wright, Stolen Continents (164-166). For a more detailed analysis of Silko's use of these sources see Chapter One, "A Place to See," above.

15. Ronald Wright, Stolen Continents (165). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

16. Marion Stowell, The Colonial Weekday Bible, (19).

17. See Bernard Capp, English Almanacs, 1500-1800: Astrology and the Popular Press, (215-238).

18. As the introduction to Florence Hawley's The Hopi: Their History and Use of Lands explains, many of the original documents on the history and anthropology of many American Indian tribes and groups who were involved in the Indian Claims actions are presented in Garland Publishing's American Indian Ethnohistory series. Reports on the history of Laguna landclaims, Laguna anthropological research, versions of the Laguna Pueblo emergence story, and stories about Laguna shrines, ceremonies, traditions, and hunting practices which were recounted orally and collected by scholars as the basis of Laguna landclaims have been published by Garland in

the following documents: Myra Ellen Jenkins, "History of Laguna Pueblo Land Claims" which mentions a letter written by Aunt Susie's husband, Laguna governor Walter G. Marmon, about encroachment on Laguna land (117-118); Robert L. Rands, "Laguna Land Utilization" which addresses Laguna shrines and hunting practices (68-70); Florence Hawley Ellis, "Anthropology of Laguna Pueblo Land Claims" in which several transcripts of oral versions of the Laguna story of emergence are published. Hawley's document illustrates how ancient stories and modern scholarship can work together to establish legal claim to Indian lands. She writes: "Although certain parts of the Pueblo origin legends, including statements of time, appear to be primarily symbolic, archaeologists have found that the general account a pueblo gives of its history usually is verifiable by archaeology and actually does record the major movements of that people" (6).

19. The Laguna people, like other Pueblo peoples, believe that their ancestors emerged from the earth into this world after traveling up through several underground levels or worlds. For more on the "sipapo," or place of emergence, see Simon Ortiz, "Poetics and Politics" (3).

20. "The Incarceration of Wilderness: Wilderness Areas as Prisons" (6). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

21. In 1972, the U.S. federal government sought to designate the Four Corners region and certain radiation impacted areas of the Dakotas, Wyoming and Montana as "National Sacrifice Areas" which, according to Ward Churchill and Winona LaDuke, means areas rendered literally uninhabitable through the deliberate elimination of the water supplies for industrial purposes . . . and the proliferation of nuclear contamination (much of which carries a lethal halflife of from 1/4 to 1/2 million years.) See Churchill and LaDuke, "Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism," (119-120). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

22. The Laguna people's experience is not unique. Similar stories can be told at many American Southwest sites, including the Navajo Nation and Hopi, Acoma, Zuni, Cochiti, Isleta, and Jemez Pueblos.

23. "Annals from the Laboratory State" (49). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

24. See Miguel Leon-Portialla, "Men of Maize," (159, 167). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

25. In Beliefs and Holy Places, James S. Griffith writes that in the Southwest today, the snake is still a powerful being to be propitiated (173) and that vestiges of "la corua"--which is a regional word which means "large, thick snake"--can still be found. Griffith found that the root of the word, co, seems to mean "snake" in many languages of the Uto-Aztecan family to which the Yaqui languages belongs, and that the same root appears in the Aztec word "quetzalcoatl," the name of the great feathered serpent deity who was involved with the winds and with water" (5). To the high cultures of Mesoamerica, Griffith writes, "Quetzalcoatl was much more than a plumed serpent connected with water. While his name can mean "plumed serpent," it can also mean "heavenly twin." He was god of the winds, god of the morning, god of twins and monsters, and the planet Venus" (9). Griffith adds that "Quetzalcoatl's image in his manifestation as the plumed serpent was painted on pottery, engraved on shell, and even piled out of dirt and stones to form a huge effigy mound at Casa Grands" in the Mexican state of Chihuahua (11). Silko may have been thinking about this huge earthen effigy at Casa Grands when she created the giant sandstone snake.

Also, for a discussion of Chicano/a practice of a folk Catholicism in the United States which incorporates indigenous elements of Mesoamerican religion and Catholicism, see Gloria Anzaldua, "Enterning Into the Serpent," Borderlands / La Frontera: The New Mestiza, San Francisco: spinster/ Aunt Lute, 1987, 25-39.

26. Michael Foucault argues in Power / Knowledge that it is always through the power of "subjugated knowledges" that a criticism of hegemonic discourses begins to perform its work" (82). Foucault writes that a "hegemonic discourse" is a discourse which claims for itself the power to produce "truth," to define what is "right," "natural," and "good for mankind" while "subjugated knowledges" are those "low-ranking knowledges"; knowledges which are "local, regional," "popular knowledges (le savoir des gens)," "incapable of unanimity," and "disqualified from the hierarchy of knowledges and science" (82). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

27. Also see Carolyn Merchant, Ecological Revolutions, (134). See Chapter One, above, for a detailed analysis of Silko's inclusion of early colonial American almanacs in her "keepers" almanac.

28. For a more detailed discussion of Bacon and his experimental method, see Carolyn Merchant, Death of Nature, (169-181).

29. Visvanathan notes that in the U.S. today, 63 million animals are dissected in U.S. laboratories annually (43).

30. See Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, or The Inspection House. Edward Said's Orientalism provides an excellent illustration of the way in which Europeans militarists, administrators, and bureaucrats were able to wield their scientific, anthropological, sociological, historical, and philological knowledges to claim a "vision" which illuminated the darkness of non-European lands and peoples (69, 240). Orientalist scholars claimed to make "all things" about Oriental peoples and lands "visible" to European peoples by "making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, teaching it, settling it, authorizing it, ruling over it" (3). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

31. Silko was undoubtedly thinking of the Biosphere 2 which was built by Texas billionaire Ed Bass and co-founder John Allen in the Sonoran desert just outside of Tucson, Arizona, during the time she was writing her novel. Ground was broken in January of 1987, and in September of 1991, eight "biospherians" and thousands of exotic plant and animal species were sealed into the Biosphere for a two year "mission." Founder Allen has been accused of being an authoritarian cult leader who advocates the teachings of G.I. Gurdijieff. Scientists have criticized the Biosphere as not being "real science" but, instead, a commune funded by the wealthy Bass for his followers. For a detailed history of the Biosphere and a lengthy examination of its founders, followers, advocates, and critics, see Jim Erickson, "The Man Who Ran the Biosphere" (1A+).

32. Quoted in Brian Easlea, Fathering the Unthinkable: Masculinity, Scientists and the Nuclear Arms Race (90). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

33. In a House Subcommittee Report on "Oversights and Investigations" titled The Forgotten Guinea Pigs, a representative to the 96th Congress of the United States stated, "The greatest irony of our atmospheric testing program is that the only victims of U.S. nuclear arms since World War II have been our own people" (Qtd. in Philip L. Frandkin, Fallout: An American Nuclear Tragedy, [65]).

34. Elizabeth Bird, "The Social Construction of Nature," (258). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

35. In Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, Haraway writes that "a cyborg world might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship with animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (154).

36. Secret of Life, Secrets of Death: Essays on Language, Gender and Science (4).

37. In Dennis Tedlock's translation of the Popol Vuh into English, the Quiche Mayan writers of the Popol Vuh call their text a "place to see." See Chapter One above for a detailed analysis of the Popul Vuh as one of the ancient texts on which Silko models her fictional almanac.

Chapter Five
Running from Red House: Towards
an Ecological Pedagogy

It is, after all, a universal story. The boarding schools are an important part of our history and we have counterparts to the boarding school system in every culture and in every time. So I think that one can look at a story on this subject with very great interest.

--N. Scott Momaday, Interview with Jeff Hamley

. . . when some violent emotional experience takes place . . . many people will come to you and take you aside, or maybe a couple of people will come and talk to you. These are occasions of storytelling. These occasions of storytelling are continuous; they are a way of life.

--Leslie Marmon Silko

In Louise Erdrich's "Indian Boarding School: The Runaways," runaway children with the "worn-down welts of ancient punishment" singlemindedly dash for "Turtle Mountains." Caught and made to scrub "the sidewalks down because it's shameful work," the runaways must "wear dresses, long green ones, / the color you would think shame was" (59). In this poem, the Indian boarding school becomes a symbol of the United States government's attempt to forcibly educate/assimilate whole cultures into the dominant culture and the runaways become a powerful symbol for the failure of that attempt. Erdrich's poem is poignant and painful and, based on readings of texts like hers, it would be easy to assume that difficult memories of boarding school experiences might tactfully be avoided in Native American communities. In fact, this is not the case. By 1928, almost 90 percent of Indian children were enrolled in some type of boarding school

(Szasz and Ryan 294). This means that in almost every contemporary Native American family there is someone--grandparent, parent, uncle, aunt, brother or sister--who has attended a boarding school. The collective experience of the many Indian children who have gone and are still going to boarding schools has resulted, according to Jeff Hamley, Director of Harvard's Native American Studies Program, in a complex folk culture which "endures today in tribes across the United States" ("Cultural" 23). Boarding school as a topic of conversation comes up frequently, writes Sally J. McBeth in an ethnographic study of the boarding school experiences of West-Central Oklahoma American Indians. "Former students seemed to enjoy recounting the exploits and traumas of their experiences" to other family and community members (McBeth 143).

Boarding school stories, then, are very much a part of the oral tradition of contemporary Native American communities and, as folklorist Alan Dundes points out, when "a genre of oral literature is found in a culture there will also be a tradition of the use of that genre" ("Oral Literature" 122). Therefore, in this essay, by focusing on boarding school stories which have been told by older members of Native American communities to current Native American college students, I will explore how boarding school stories are being used in what Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs have termed a

"system of historical relationship" (78). It is primarily "as a means of communication" that stories out of the oral tradition need to be studied, assert Dundes and E. Ojo Arewa. "Yet this is virtually impossible with the common practice of recording just the texts alone, a practice consistent with the mistaken emphasis in folklore upon the lore rather than upon the folk" ("Proverbs" 70). So, in order to understand how boarding school stories become a vehicle of communication and how they communicate multiple meanings, I will also focus on the community contexts in which several boarding school stories are being told/retold.

I

In the Fall of 1991, I was asked to teach a section of freshman composition set aside for Native American students. This class had been arranged jointly by the Native American Resource Center and the English Composition Department in response to calls by Arizona tribal leaders for the University of Arizona to work more diligently at retention of Native American students.¹ The number of Native American freshman entering colleges and universities may be up,² but the ideological conflict of choosing between the values, traditions, and philosophies of their cultural heritages and those of mainstream America still lead many to drop out before their educations are finished.³ As a Hopi graduate student who works with in one of the University of Arizona's summer

programs for minority students told me,

No matter how much success I achieve in my college program, if I do not attend to my corn in the traditional way, I am not a Hopi. And how can I take good care of my corn when I am always here in Tucson, [Arizona]? I think of this conflict often; I go home often because of it, and my college work sometimes suffers because of it.⁴

The purpose then, of bringing Native American freshmen together, keeping the class size small, and working with subjects and assignments which are heavily but not exclusively related to Indian interests is to provide Native American students with a supportive environment, especially in the critical first year of college. Student response to the class has been positive. In an evaluation of the class, one Navajo student wrote, "this was the first time I had even really read about Native Americans, it was always about the WHITE SOCIETY" (emphasis his). He added, "It helps you when you look around and see others like you succeeding."⁵

But the class also posed several challenges. Members of the class came from several tribes--Yaqui, White Mountain Apache, San Carlos Apache, Navajo, Hopi, Tohono O'odham. Some had grown up in urban areas of Phoenix or Tucson while most had grown up on reservations. Several of the students had come from the same home town, gone to the same high school, or met each other previously in the various summer programs for

minority students offered by the University of Arizona. Consequently, a palpable closeness had already developed within the group before I entered the classroom for the first time. And because I didn't share in their cultural and ethnic backgrounds--I am Anglo-American--there was a subtle insider/outsider dynamic in our class which was different from other sections of Freshman English that I have taught. I was teaching Native American materials but what did I really know about the day-to-day lives, cultural backgrounds, and educational expectations of seventeen and eighteen year-old Native American students?

In order to create a supportive environment for my students, I needed to get to know them better. So I began regular conferences with my students and on these occasions I would talk to them not only about upcoming essay assignments but also about their cultural and educational backgrounds. In one of these conferences, Melanie Bautista, a young Tohono O'odham/Yaqui woman, and I were discussing one of her essays and the conversation turned to her experience at the university and then to what had motivated her to seek a college education. She explained that when she was small, her grandmother had advised her that

Even if you don't like it, take advantage of your opportunities for education and stay in school. When I

was your age, I had to go to boarding school and I didn't like it and dropped out.⁶

Her grandmother had then gone on to tell Melanie stories about some of her boarding school experiences.

When Melanie told me about how her grandmother had used stories about her own boarding school experience to encourage Melanie to get an education, I became more aware that many of my students' parents and grandparents had attended boarding schools and that the stories about these experiences were being told as "family stories" which, as Leslie Silko explains, "are just as important as the other stories--the older stories. [They] are . . . a very critical part of one's childhood" (58) because they have the power to help "the individual in crisis" (60). Leaving home and/or going off to college for the first time has certainly been interpreted as a time of crisis by countless numbers of students and parents of all cultures; obviously, an event as dramatic as this will occasion storytelling about how family members have handled similar kinds of crises.

So upon hearing Melanie's story, I began to wonder how the stories about boarding school experiences were influencing the attitudes and perceptions of current Native American college students, many of whom have never gone to boarding schools themselves. As my students began to tell me some of the boarding school stories they had heard while growing up

and told me of the contexts in which these stories were told, I gained considerable insight into how, as Silko puts it, storytelling about a "shared experience" which "grows out of a strong community base" (57) is helping many Native American college students cope with the difficulties they face as they build bridges between their own culture and the dominant culture. These students may be receiving much needed support for their educations in university recruitment and retention programs or classes that take their worldviews into account, but, through family storytelling, many of these students are receiving an even more powerful form of encouragement to get a college education.

II

The history of Indian education in America is, of course, too long and complex to detail here. However, to more fully understand the stories that my students told me, some knowledge of the historical and contemporary position of Indian boarding schools is necessary. Briefly, the first school for North American Indians was founded in 1523 by a Belgian Franciscan, Pedro de Gante, in Mexico. In the 17th and 18th centuries, under British colonization, the cause of Indian education was promoted only sporadically (Kickingbird, Part I 14). In the 1740s, for example, during the signing of the Treaty of Lancaster between the Government of Virginia and the Six Nations of the Iroquois Confederacy, the Virginia

Commissioners offered to educate six Seneca young men. In his reply, a Seneca chief recalls previous efforts to educate his people and eloquently sums up his tribe's attitude towards the results.

Several of our young people were . . . instructed in all your sciences; but when they came back to us they were bad runners, ignorant of every means of living in the woods, unable to bear either cold or hunger, knew neither how to build a cabin, take a deer nor kill an enemy, spoke our language imperfectly; were therefore neither fit for hunters, warriors nor counselors; they were totally good for nothing. We are, however, not the less obliged by your kind offer, though we decline accepting it; and to show our grateful sense of it, if the gentlemen of Virginia will send us a dozen of their sons we will take great care of their education, instruct them, in all we know, and make men of them. (qtd. in Kickingbird, Part I 15).

The United States government did not really play an active role in Indian education until 1879 when the first nonreservation government boarding school was established at Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Others schools--such as Forest Grove, Newkirk, Haskell, Albuquerque, Santa Fe, and Phoenix--rapidly followed (Kickingbird, Part II 17). The programs and philosophies of these schools, according to Jeff Hamley, were

effectively a form of "cultural genocide." Boarding school officials, writes Hamley,

insistently exacted the unrealistic and ethnocentric expectation that Indian children give up their culture and accept new identities as members of a foreign culture. Upon arrival of new students to boarding schools, these officials ritualistically cut Indian children's hair, stripped and bathed them, clothed them in uniforms, and imposed new names upon them. Indian students were constantly reminded that they were morally, socially, and culturally deficient compared to Whites. ("Cultural" 15, 23)

Not surprisingly, by 1928, when almost 90 percent of Indian children were enrolled in some type of school, the "tragic stories of children who had died attempting to return home" had already become a symbol for the failure of these institutions (Szasz and Ryan 294-95).

In the 1930s, the federal government was forced to acknowledge, write Kirke and Lynn Kickingbird, "that attempts to educate Indian youngsters met with more success when they went to schools (public or federal) near their home communities" (Part II, 19). Consequently, in 1934, the Johnson-O'Malley Act "enabled the government to reimburse state and local school districts for the education of Indian children" (Kickingbird, Part II 20). This Act allowed more

Indian children to attend public schools close to their own homes; however, money reimbursed to local school districts was rarely directed towards meeting the particular cultural needs of Indian children, so the quality of their educations was not greatly enhanced. In 1953, the Bureau of Indian Affairs directed that Indian students attend public schools wherever space was available. This meant that more and more students were attending publicly-funded schools in their local areas while BIA-funded boarding schools, according to Sally McBeth, gradually

became the educational facility for [Native American] students who had social or educational problems. Eligibility for admission was based on need for special educational programs not available locally (including English language programs), or on those whose social needs could not be met in their community (unstable home life, behavioral problems). (78-79)

Today, McBeth adds, boarding schools "continue to provide services to those students with special behavioral and personal problems (e.g., truancy, alcoholism, frequent acts of physical violence or arrests)" (79).

III

After talking with Melanie about the boarding school stories her grandmother had told her, I asked other students if they had heard similar stories. Most had and a few of the

students decided that it might be interesting to share some of the stories that they had heard circulating around in their families or communities. We decided to meet in my office which is in an old, stuccoed house just south of the stadium.⁷

Clayton Nez, a Navajo who lived with his grandmother while he was growing up on the reservation was the first to arrive. He is the first male on his mother's side to go to college. Clayton told me he would only be able to stay for an hour since he had to go home and watch The Simpsons at 7:00; after the program was over, he said, he would be back. Next came Adrienne King, whose mother is Navajo and whose father is Ottawa/Pottawatamie/Chippewa. Both Adrienne's mother and father are college graduates and Adrienne has lived in Tucson all her life. Melanie Bautista arrived with Veronica Felix, who is Yaqui. These two have been friends since high school, sit together in class, and often do their homework together. They grew up just outside the boundaries of a Yaqui reservation in Tucson. Sherwin Curly and Arly Bee, Navajos who graduated together from Ganado High School in the Four Corners area arrived next. Because Sherwin and Arly took courses on Navajo life and history at their high school, they are both increasingly interested in their traditional culture. Stephanie Calvin, who lived with her grandmother and learned to speak Navajo while she attended a high school boarding school on the reservation, was the last to arrive.

After everyone was comfortable, each student took turns "performing" his or her story/stories. Except for the story which Sherwin told about two runaway boys, all the stories were retellings of the personal narratives that had been told to my students by family members--parents, grandparents, and in one case, a brother. When a student was finished telling a story, I asked him or her to recall when he or she had heard the story and speculate about why the story had been told. Essentially, I was asking them to "entextualize" their stories or, as Bauman and Briggs explain, lift the story out of its "interactional settings" (73) in order to be able to think reflexively about the story's contexts, meanings and "history of use" (Bauman and Briggs 73). As Barbara Babcock has written, "lived experience acquires meaning and is understood only reflexively . . . when it is 'framed'" (3). By performing their stories, each student and member of the audience was providing a frame to the stories that invited, as Bauman and Briggs have asserted, "critical reflection on communicative processes" (60). Indeed, as Keith Basso explains in his discussion of Western Apache moral narratives, only by inviting storytellers into the interpretive process can we understand how people construct their world and render it significant through stories. If our interpretations of those stories are to be valid, storytellers must explicate their own texts by making their implicit cultural assumptions

explicit (50). By understanding the presuppositions, background knowledge, shared beliefs and the contexts which make stories possible in the first place, writes Basso, we can "construct principled interpretations of culturally constituted worlds and try to understand what living in them is like" (51).

Consequently, any "principled interpretation" of my students' stories is substantially dependent upon the reflexive comments which they made about their own stories and their comments about the contexts in which they first heard the stories told. Recalling the occasions when they heard family members tell these stories or, in other words, their "histories of use," Sherwin, Arly, Stephanie, and Melanie agreed that the subject of boarding schools would often come up in the context of a family discussion about their educations. For example, when Sherwin and his parents were talking about his education or when he would be discouraged or angry that his schooling (or his parents) prevented him from doing the things he wanted to do, Sherwin's parents would tell him stories from their own boarding school experience and tell him, **How good you have it.**⁸ (Because her parents had said similar things to her, Stephanie laughed and nodded her head when Sherwin said this. **"I got that one!"** she said [8].) Sherwin's parents had gone to a strict Seventh Day Adventist boarding school; so, the implicit assumption of this

story, is that Sherwin will consider his own lack of freedom in relation to his parent's boarding school situation and understand that, by comparison, he has it pretty good (8-9).

However, educational discussions were not the only context in which boarding school stories would be told. When Veronica would get mad because she had **do everything [the housework] perfectly** (12), her mother would tell Veronica of her experience in a school so strict that there were **bells for everything. Time to wake up, time to go to the bathroom, bells to eat, bells to sleep, everything was bells** (10). Expecting her daughter to understand that her extremely regimented daily existence while at school is the reason why she is **very picky in everything she does** (12) and why she now wants the house to be **so perfect and clean every Saturday** (10), Veronica's mother would tell Veronica simply that **that was the way she was brought up** (12). Boarding school experiences then, are stories that have multiple uses. They function in the past to acquaint the child or grandchild with events which happened to the storyteller and they function in the present to implicitly influence how the listener will think about a current situation or dilemma. As Sally McBeth explains, when former students tell boarding school stories, the situations of the stories are "structured and re-structured to take on new meanings" (McBeth 114) in current

situations.

McBeth also observes that when boarding school stories are told/re-structured in current situations, they often embody attitudes of both resistance and acceptance (134). The personal narrative of Melanie Bautista's grandmother, for example, distinctly embodies an attitude of concerted resistance to the federal government's efforts to control Indian people through the boarding school system. But at the same time, the narrative shows acceptance of education as a positive goal for Melanie. I was small. I was about nine, Melanie told us as she began her story. My mother would go to work or something and she [my grandmother] would tell stories. I would ask her questions about what it was like when she was small (2) and she would just sit there and tell me stuff (1). Her grandmother was born on the reservation and she was twelve when a man came from Phoenix and was picking up Indian children and taking them to school. He took my grandmother and my aunt and her sister away (1). The words Melanie chooses--"picking up" and "taking them . . . away"--imply that the act was done against the children's and the parents' wills. These words clearly articulate a sense of the oppression, personal affliction and loss of cultural identity felt by families whose children are taken away from their homes and native cultures.

Her grandmother, Melanie repeats for emphasis, **didn't**

like school and she wouldn't pay attention. She would try to cheat on tests because she really didn't like school (2). Here, Melanie's grandmother shows her resistance to her forced education through failure to perform in expected ways and by undermining the systems which are set up to test performance. This kind of non-performance, notes McBeth, was common. Students who attended Indian boarding schools were often "reluctant to exchange basic Indian values for an education that [had] the distinct potential of turning them into social outcasts in their tribal environments" (McBeth 130). Melanie's grandmother chooses the ultimate form of resistance when she decides to run away from there [Phoenix Indian School] with a friend (2). She was brought back to school after a week spent in Tucson and Ajo and she was punished; she had to clean the bathrooms for a week (2). But like many Native Americans who "passionately believe in the centrality of education in our country" (McBeth 134), Melanie's grandmother, as Melanie emphasizes, was glad she had gone to school and wished that she had paid attention. Maybe she could have got a career or something. Ultimately, this grandmother frames her narrative to communicate acceptance of the idea that education will be necessary for Melanie and even insists that Melanie take advantage of her opportunities for education. She, Melanie continues, told me that school was real important and that even if I didn't like it I should go

and try to learn because that would ensure my future (3).

Taken away from her own culture and placed in a situation where she was expected to adopt another culture, Melanie's grandmother was in a very, to use Victor Turner's apt phrase, "betwixt and between" or liminal state. It is perhaps not surprising then, that a personal narrative about a liminal period would embody what Turner has called "opposite processes and notions in a single representation" ("Betwixt" 99). Liminality, Turner explains, "enfranchises speculation. . . . Liminality is the realm of primitive hypothesis, where there is a certain freedom to" intermingle and juxtapose "the categories of event, experience, and knowledge, with a pedagogic intention" ("Betwixt" 106). By creating a narrative that embodies both resistance to control and acceptance of education as necessary and positive in the contemporary world, Melanie's grandmother self-reflexively constructs a personal narrative of her own boarding school experience which comments upon and positively directs the course of her granddaughter's educational experience.

Like Melanie's grandmother's story, Veronica's mother's story embodies a history of oppression, personal affliction, and loss of cultural identity--that is the story which implicitly undergirds many of these boarding school narratives--but the story is also told in a way which re-frames or re-presents images of positive Indian values. This

is a personal narrative which tells of Veronica's mother's experience at the Arizona School for the Deaf and Blind and illustrates how she resisted the English-only rule but also proudly proclaims to her daughter that the characteristic she values most is being able to care for and nurture other human beings. Veronica relates:

When she [Veronica's mom] went there she was about nine. She said it was strange because she didn't know anybody and she remembers one day she saw this little girl--a little Mexican girl--and all she could speak was Spanish . . . and she felt sorry for her because she . . . didn't want to leave her mom and dad and she was totally blind. So she [Veronica's mom] went and asked them if it would be okay if she could take care of her [the little girl] while she was there because they had to leave. . . . And there at ASDB they didn't allow them to speak Spanish out loud, so she would have to . . . take her into one of the corners and console her and tell her that everything would be alright. It made her feel good because it made her feel like she was actually taking care of somebody else. (10-11)

McBeth explains that "Many of the positive feelings expressed about the boarding schools relate to the emotional aspects of close friendships, rather than to the supposedly beneficial nature of the "total" experience" (McBeth 119). Certainly

Veronica's mom, although she felt she learned **very, very well there** (11) remembers most fondly not her education but her association with this little girl. **They're still good friends**, said Veronica, **She still calls her and goes to her house and stuff** (11).⁹

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about both Melanie's and Veronica's stories is the way in which both grandmother and mother create their personal narratives to emphasize the positive rather than the negative. Sandra Stahl explains in Literary Folkloristics and the Personal Narrative that personal narratives are a primary "means by which a special kind of folklore is expressed. Nonverbalized folklore--attitudes, values, prejudices, tastes" (19). Moreover, "The advantage of the personal narrative is that the storyteller chooses the specific situation (plot) that aptly expresses a covertly held value" (Stahl 19). In other words, both these women are creating narratives about a liminal period in their lives and telling these stories to children who, because they have grown up in cultures that often still emphasize Native American values and traditions, might also experience their educations as a liminal period. The events in the stories are carefully chosen and arranged so that Melanie and Veronica will see their grandmother and mother as heroes with the character traits and values that allow them to face their liminal experiences in a positive way.

In "Social Dramas and Stories about Them," Victor Turner writes that

meaning always involves retrospection and reflexivity, a past, a history. Meaning is the only category which grasps the full relation of the part to the whole in life, for value, being dominantly affective, belongs essentially to an experience in a conscious present.

(156)

This means that in the present, Melanie's grandmother and Veronica's mother are reflexively looking back on their past experiences to find the value in those experiences. In the liminal state of reflexivity, a state which, according to Turner, is "set apart from the ongoing business of quotidian life," these women are able to make an interpretation of the events of their lives which gives "the appearance of sense and order to the events leading up to and constituting crisis" (Turner, "Social" 156). Having made an interpretation of the value to be found in those events, these women create stories that will be able to influence and transmit the values they cherish to their grandchildren and children and help them face their own liminal experiences. This shows that, as Turner points out, there is a "dynamic relation between social drama and expressive cultural genres" ("Social" 154).

In both Melanie's grandmother's and Veronica's mother's stories, the negative is not ignored. In both the stories we

see children forced against their wills to leave home and children forbidden to speak their own languages. But, as Elaine Jahner explains, these negative aspects are "subordinated to a pattern" (219) which transforms the materials of the storyteller's life "into a story that shows the design of courage and independence" (Jahner 223).¹⁰ Veronica's mother, for example, could sneak off in a corner and courageously break the English-only rule in order to comfort a frightened child. By showing how an individual can utilize "the resources of their own creativity and courage to shape, and in some cases to escape, the roles presented them" (Jahner 214) by oppressive systems, these stories give children, to use Kenneth Burke's words, "strategies for dealing with situations" (296), "equipment for living" (304).¹¹ Family and community stories "bring incidents down to a level we can deal with" writes Leslie Silko. "If others have done it before, it cannot be so terrible. If others have endured, so can we" (Silko 59). The exemplary patterns which can be created from boarding school experiences, then, are a wonderful way in which parents and grandparents can create alternatives and pass on possibilities to their children.¹²

As stated above, stories from the oral tradition always have multiple uses. The story which Sherwin told about two run-away boys not only conveys a sense of the values his family and community cherish but the story is told in a way

that implicitly censures the federal government for the irresponsible way that contemporary boarding schools are run. Most interesting, however, is the way in which the story is patterned in accordance to some very traditional Navajo storytelling patterns. In this way, Sherwin's story passes along some very old Navajo traditions to the younger generation. The event about which Sherwin told our class happened four or five years ago, on a bitingly cold Fall night and had become **the main topic of conversation for about a week afterwards** (19) in his community. The story has entered into the oral tradition and Sherwin's mom tells the story often enough that Sherwin clearly recognizes that it is her story. **I'm not a good storyteller**, he said. **You should hear my mom tell this story** (19). But language did work for Sherwin that night and we sat enthralled as he told us the story.¹³

See my grandparents they move from house to house, they're sort of like, they take care of livestock. So they have to move to different pastures and they have about five different houses. There's this one house, it's a stone house, it's got two bedrooms and a living room. It's not too big, it's not too small, it's just right. It's my nalee's--that's my grandmother on my father's side in Navajo--my nalee's house. Anyway, I'd say about four miles from her place is a place called Kinlichee, which means Red House and by coincidence Red

House is my born-for clan. Kinlichee is the place where there's a boarding school that's operating now. And these two little boys, not that old, maybe eight or nine, second grade maybe, their parents pick them up on Fridays. They usually get picked up on Fridays. And these two little guys they ran away because they hated it. The school, the boys go down there and it seems like it has lower standards. The parents don't want their kids and stuff like that and instead of keeping them home they send them to the boarding school and stuff like that. And it seem like the burden is put on the school to help and they can't really relate, relate to the children.

Well, anyway, one night they left, they snuck away from the school and they just traveled along the wash until they got to my nalee's house. My grandparents weren't there at the time. It was around, it was about this time of the year. They bust the window, they got into the house. Once inside the house, I don't know why they did this, they went crazy and stuff. There was this bag of flour in the kitchen. They cut open the flour and mixed it with water and plastered the living room floor. And they cut open the couches. And there was this refrigerator where they keep meat. They unplugged the refrigerator and all the meat thawed out. And all this

time the people were trying to look for them and they couldn't find them. You wouldn't find that place if you didn't know where it was. . .

Then they pulled a mattress outside the front, front door. They took the mattress out of the bedroom through a window! They didn't unlock the door, the door was still locked! And they took lamps and they took off the lamp shades and they put the lamps all the way around the bed and they plugged it into the light socket and they turned them on. They slept there all night! I don't know why they did this, for warmth maybe, but they could have slept in the house. And all this time the people were trying to look for them. They almost froze.

But they finally did catch them. They had an uncle who worked at the school and he found them the next day and took them back to school. I don't think they ran away again; they just stayed there. They just kept an eye on them. It's kind of weird but they wanted to get home, they didn't want the police to catch them. Good thing they didn't freeze though.

Sherwin's story, told most often by his mother who is an assistant counselor in the public schools and therefore immediately concerned with education in the community, clearly is told to comment upon and lay blame for the current state of underfunded federal boarding schools which have become since

1953, dumping grounds for "problem children." In the commentary which Sherwin made after telling his story, it becomes clear that one of the reasons why his mother tells this story repeatedly is because it illustrates the community's concern for the children who end up at these badly-run facilities. It's not a reform school, said Sherwin. It's for kids from kindergarten through eighth grade. They're just like smaller kids. I feel sorry for those kids because their parents are like alcoholics and stuff like that. It's a sad situation there (7). The parents of these children hope the school will take care of the kids for them (7), but people tell stories about the kids crying at night and some of them had really bad problems (8). This story, like Melanie's and Veronica's, comments upon the federal government's failure to provide good educations to Native American children and at the same time conveys a traditional Navajo value--concern for each individual of the community. Emphasizing his community's concern for these children, Sherwin emphatically states, I feel sorry for those kids, and adds, Good thing they didn't freeze (7).

Sherwin's story is also patterned according to traditional Navajo storytelling practices because it conveys Sherwin's positive sense of place (the boarding school is operating on land with the same name as his born-for clan). Keith Basso, citing a personal communication in 1973 with

Harry Hoijir, establishes the importance of place to Apachean groups like the Navajo. Hoijir told Basso:

Even the most minute occurrences are described by Navajos in close conjunction with their physical settings, suggesting that unless narrated events are spacially anchored their significance is somehow reduced and cannot be properly assessed. (qtd. in Basso 26)

Moreover, Sherwin's story also conveys a sense of Navajo culture and tradition by explaining to his mostly non-Navajo class-mates why his grandparents have five houses, that they raise livestock and that his grandmother owns the livestock and the houses. The story is traditionally patterned because it establishes Sherwin's clan (Red House) and his exact relationship to his grandparents (these are his father's parents). Sherwin's story is "individualistic and of the present, but group traditions affect its overall patterning" (Jahner 218).

In a private conversation on November 15, 1991, Gloria Bird, a friend and colleague who attended Riverside Indian Boarding School in Oklahoma, told me that she heard few boarding school stories while she was growing up. She believes there are two possible reasons for this. One reason might have been that the experiences were too difficult for her parents to repeat. Another more probable reason, she believes, is that from the time she was small, she was always

away at boarding school and was never home long enough to hear about the experiences of her parents. My students, however, have all heard boarding school stories either from parents or grandparents possibly because they are among the first Native American children who have been able to attend schools close to their homes and therefore have been able to hear the stories of family members. By listening to and retelling boarding school stories, these young people are participating in the intertribal folk culture of which Jeff Hamley speaks and passing on, by word of mouth, both a tradition of resistance to unjust control and those attitudes, characteristics, tastes and group traditions most valued by their communities. These stories have entered the oral tradition and become vehicles for expressing and learning values.

Every year, more and more Native American students enter the colleges and universities in America. Each year, many of these students face the ideological controversy which McBeth discusses. Perhaps, the boarding school stories--the stories of how parents and grandparents faced educational dilemmas--will provide them with some of their most effective "strategies for living."

Notes

1. In a recent meeting held between new University of Arizona President Manuel Pacheco and representatives of several Arizona Indian tribes, Peter Zah, President of the Navaho Nation, stated, "I don't see black kids dropping out as much as Indians. Many Navaho students come back to the reservation (after dropping out) and complain about how cold the university is" (Rawlinson).

2. In 1984, according to Robert Williams, director of the University of Arizona's Office of Indian Programs, only 52 Native American freshmen registered for classes and in 1991, 110 did so (Rawlinson).

3. In "Folklore, Worldview, and Communication," Barre Toelken, who taught Freshman Composition for Native American students at the University of Oregon, cautions his readers that American tribes are so disparate that it is really impossible to make generalizations about "the Indian." But "for the sake of discussion," Toelken characterizes Anglo-American worldview as "lineal" and Native American worldview as "circular" (272). This helps to explain, according to Toelken, why Native American students at the University of Oregon almost universally felt that it was Freshman Composition that was impeding their movement through college and eventually causing them to drop out (280). To many of these students, observes Toelken, the whole lineal concept of an "orderly theme" seemed "illogical" or, according to those "members of tribes who believed a person became someone only with age and experience" (280), such topics as the autobiographical essay were "things you just can't talk about" (280). See also Greg Sarris's "Storytelling in the Classroom: Crossing Vexed Chasms."

4. Private communication on June 10, 1991.

5. This comment was made in an evaluation of the class written during the final week of the semester.

6. Personal communication with Melanie Bautista.

7. Students recorded their own stories, transcribed the tapes, and then as part of an essay assignment for their freshman composition class, rhetorically analyzed their own stories. This became a unique way for students to meet one of the requirements of the freshman composition program--to learn how to rhetorically analyze texts. I was given permission by each of the students to use their transcripts and rhetorical analyses in this essay, which I shared

with my students at the end of the course.

8. Sherwin's statement is taken from page 16 of my transcript of this session. All subsequent bolded statements will be cited parenthetically with the page number from the transcript.

9. In a personal conversation on November 15, 1990 with Gloria Bird who attended Riverside Boarding School in Oklahoma, we discussed my student's stories and the positive values which they convey in the face of institutionalized oppression. Gloria told me that while she hated her boarding school experience, she values the friendships she made with kids from other tribes from across the nation. "I can go anywhere," she told me, "and I know someone who lives there." McBeth writes that camaraderie or nurturance was a common experience in the boarding schools. Moreover, "to supply care, help and comfort in times of need is a value of Indian culture" (McBeth 141).

10. In "Women Remembering: Life History as Exemplary Pattern," Elaine Jahner examines the life history of a Brule Sioux woman, Ann Keller, and finds that in Keller's narrative there is a "constant emphasis on the positive and a very careful elimination of that which cannot provide an example for others" (Jahner 218). Jahner notes that in this kind of positive construction of her life story, Keller is not unique for

accounts collected under comparable conditions show the same tendency on the part of the women to use the events of their own lives to sketch a model or a pattern that can permit the audience to use experiences as positive example. This is not to say that the negative is ignored. It is subordinated to a pattern. (218-219)

Keller, writes Jahner, is constructing an "exemplary design" which shapes "a personal and cultural identity that has meaning not only for her but for her grandchildren" (Jahner 219).

11. Whenever "situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them" (296-297), writes Burke. Building on Burke, Peter Seitel explains that folklore (he refers specifically to proverbs) is often spoken to "resolve a felt conflict" (133). Native American boarding school stories, then, are strategies which name situations and help people handle those situations or resolve conflicts.

12. Almost all of the published biographies by Native Americans which include accounts of their experiences at boarding school put these experiences in a positive light. This is especially true of

the women. While one explanation for this is certainly that most of these accounts are the "as told to" biographies of those Native Americans that have been "successful" according to Western standards and are now telling their life histories to a Euro-American who transforms the material into a biography, this cannot be the only explanation since almost all of the subjects of these biographies specifically tell their biographers that the biggest reason they are telling their stories is so that their children, grandchildren and others of their tribe will benefit from their experiences. As good examples of "as told to" biographies which transform boarding school experiences into "exemplary designs," see Polingaysi Qoyawayma's No Turning Back: A True Account of a Hopi Indian Girl's Struggle to Bridge the Gap Between the World of Her People and the World of the White Man, Me and Mine: The Life Story of Helen Sekaquaptewa, and I Am Nokomis, Too: The Biography of Verna Patronella Johnston. Anna Moore Shaw writes simply and eloquently of her educational experience in A Pima Past. And in Stories of Traditional Navajo Life and Culture by twenty-two Navajo men and women, the Navajo Community College collects and translates several life histories, most of which include boarding school experiences that are put in a positive light specifically, according to those telling their stories, for the benefit of children and grandchildren.

13. In the version of this story I include here, I have edited the story to include the corrections and details which Sherwin added to the story in a private conversation with me about a week after he told the story to our class. For an exact rendering of his story and the conversation which Sherwin had with me on November 21, 1991, see the transcript pages 6-7 and 19.

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